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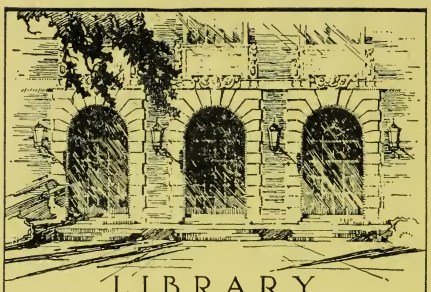

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A MAN OF MOODS

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A MAN OF MOODS

BY

H. D. LOWRY

"I will arise and go now, for always, night and day,
I hear lake-water lapping with low sounds on the shore;
As I stand in the roadway, or on the pavement grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core."

—W. B. YEATS

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TO

J. J. BERINGER

FOR

YEARS OF COMRADESHIP

August 1896

A MAN OF MOODS

CHAPTER I.

THE first grey of the morning was showing over London after a night of heavy rain. Holden came out of Gray's Inn, where he had sat since midnight, talking and smoking with certain of his friends. A few belated cabs were waiting in the long grey shining street; one of them came towards him with a noise of jingling bells, but he preferred to walk, and followed a maze of back streets (where strange old women in sordid black sat asleep in quiet doorways) towards Covent Garden. He had often gone thither after such a vigil, having found out that the sight and scent of the flowers invariably changed that sense of evil-doing which London, more than other places, imposes on the night-bird, to such a feeling of freshness and good cheer as they experience who are up to see the sun rise in the country.

The plain truth was that he possessed an exorbitant love of flowers, and never left the market without a handful of exquisite flesh-pink *Catherine Mermet* roses, or, when autumn came, a sheaf of wonderful dishevelled chrysanthemums.

It was now late in the year. The season of fogs had come and gone as completely as it ever goes from London. Christmas was close at hand, and the book-shops were daily crowded with the people who only buy books at that season of the year. But in the market were all the flowers of half-a-dozen untimely springs. Violets had now usurped the place of the mignonette whose fragrance had come to him like a new birth on certain cool June mornings. But the crowning beauty of the place consisted in its close-packed masses of scarlet anemones, and especially, in its banks of yellow daffodils and pale narcissi. In places their heavy odour warred against and overcame the scent of the violets, and everywhere the pale gold of the blooms was notable.

The proper business of the market had hardly begun as yet. The salesmen were breakfasting on tea or coffee, with huge slabs of buttered toast, brought in on the tops of flower-boxes from outside. Many of the stalls were without attendants. Holden went his way. Now and again he paused to ask the

price of something which had struck his fancy, carelessly declared it monstrous, and passed on. He would surely buy some flowers presently, but he had more particularly come to see the market.

Presently, however, he was aroused to keener interest by the sight of a stall which was all pale gold, being entirely stocked with flowers more or less after the fashion of the daffodil. There were some verses of his youth which had almost convinced him—for a fortnight—that the gods had made him a poet; they had been written in praises of daffodils, and he still loved the flowers intensely. He paused and laughed at his old ambitions. Daffodils never failed to remind him of them, pleasing him all the better for that very reason.

Suddenly a voice disturbed him: "Pretty, sure 'nough, aren't they? Wonderful pretty, they are, sure 'nough!"

He turned and stared at the intruder, a tall spare man of sixty or thereabouts, brown of face and wrinkled at the outer corners of keen grey humorous eyes. Time's record on men's faces is a very full one. Holden recognised not only the number of the stranger's years, but also that they had been passed in country air. "Yes," he said unconcernedly, "they're pretty." He turned away again.

"And yet," said the countryman, his cheerfulness maintained, "we do grow them in fields over in Scilly. 'Twould be a fine sight for a Londoner."

Something of the true rustic pity for the town-dweller was evident in his tones.

Holden faced him again, compelled to own that he was interested. "You are a flower-grower?"

The old man laughed with pride. "There's no man better known in the market of all that grow flowers in Scilly. See, 'tis my name on these boxes."

He lifted a box of daffodils from the stall, and Holden read the name: "John Cunnack, St Mary's, Scilly."

"Was you ever in Scilly, sir?" asked the man.

"No," replied Holden. "I have been in many places, but never there. It is such a long way off."

"'Tis true enough," said Cunnack. "I've heard our young men say 'tis less trouble to travel to the States than to London. But you might go the world over and see no better sights than there are in Scilly: acres o' lilies under a sky that's never long without the sun, and the very sea air smellin' o' sweet flowers .... 'Tis a place a man do long to get back to."

"You are tired of London?" asked Holden

curiously, for he could never understand how it was that men could be content to live permanently out of London.

"Tired?" echoed the flower-grower. "'Tis too big and all too noisy for me, and I'd give the world to get back to a place where I'm known and do know. I had to come up over a small matter of business, but when once that is done with not all the pleasures in London'll keep me an hour."

"They are little enough to keep a man," said Holden, "and yet they hold us."

"Yes, I suppose," said Cunnack, "a man'll always call that good that he was born to like. I know something of what London can do. There was one that would have given ten years of her life almost to come with me for these few days."

Holden was suddenly interested, and the man went on to explain.

"A niece of mine," he said. "I've a little niece that wouldn't choose to reign in glory if she had a chance to see London instead. But, of course, I couldn't bring her."

"Well," said Holden, "she will see it some day, no doubt," and he turned away. Then, remembering that he had made no purchase, he went back and bought a big bunch of giant daffodils, with great golden tubes, and paler rays behind. He nodded to the old man, who

stood watching the sale of the flowers he had grown. A moment later he was walking towards his chambers.

The streets were less deserted now. Men were going to their work, and a continuous stream of florists' carts and wagons flowed from the suburbs towards Covent Garden.

He reached his rooms and put the flowers to stand in water in a big Delft vase on the table. Then he turned to his letters. There was a book to review, and he knew that it had been sent to him only that it might irritate him into the writing of a clever and probably unjust article. He recognised the handwriting on the envelope of another letter, and knew it contained a proof which would have to be corrected before he got any sleep.

The article was one which he had written a few nights earlier in a fit of disgust with London and its life. It was a plea for holy simplicity, and for the rejection of the inessential; suggesting that the wine of life was in effect no more satisfying than its beer, while it was vastly more expensive, and further laying it down that the very end of existence was to shirk the imposition of labour, which was the curse entailed by Adam on his sons. It asserted that a man might, if he chose, become sufficient to his own needs, and that, in order to have liberty to enjoy the realities of life, one

must of necessity be moderate in the matter of his desires. In its concluding sentences the article came near to being blasphemous, for the young man turned violently upon his own gods, and swore that even culture was a sorry gain, in that, while intensifying certain faculties of enjoyment, it diminished the sources at which they might be gratified. Only one thing was wholly good: the smell of country earth, and at the thought of this he rhapsodised a little, ending with a fragment of verse, a memory of a night when he had got away from town and gone wandering late :—

Thin clouds have come across the sky,
Where late the stars were shining;
The wind's a promise of the rain
For which the earth was pining.

The trim-set gardens have the smell
Of country earth, new broken:
God loves His creatures passing well,
And gives such nights for token.

Holden went over the proof without taking any particular note of the matter it contained. He put it into an envelope, and went down to post it. On his return he saw the book lying on his table, and laid it with a pile of others in a corner of the room. For a moment he lingered to arrange the daffodils, his fingers straying lovingly among the petals. Then he rolled a cigarette and went to his bed.

Guy Holden's history was of an altogether common type. He was the only son of his mother, a clergyman's widow, who had deemed it her first duty to send him to as good a school as her means would compass for him. By dint of very considerable sacrifices she sent him to Oxford, where he won a scholarship at one of the smaller colleges. She had hoped that his father's calling would be his also, but he gradually convinced her that the hope was one she must abandon. He was near the end of his fourteenth year when she died, somewhat suddenly. The chief part of her wealth had been an annuity which died with her; but the son inherited a small—a very small—income, and had no reason for immediate anxiety when he came to the end of his term at Oxford.

It was perhaps fortunate that the good lady died when she did, for she entertained the conviction that her son was clever to a preposterous extent, and went on, illogically, to suppose that a man's degree depends almost entirely upon the talents he possesses. Unfortunately Holden had ever been a lover of byways. The delightful lectures which the prudent avoid, because they "do not pay for Schools," he attended with a desultory devotion; those that might have helped him to a high position in the Honours list he cut consistently.

In the course of time he came to know more

than a little concerning one or two of the writers who are only respectable names to the majority. Of novels—though he appeared to believe in his inmost soul that prose fiction began and ended with Fielding—he possessed a knowledge which was almost encyclopædic. Naturally he took to writing after a time; at first for a singularly, and even pretentiously, esoteric college review, and afterwards for the one or two London journals which he found willing to print him. The result of it all was to make his degree a thing hardly worth mentioning.

When he left Oxford, therefore, he took to writing. He published a little novel of which the critics spoke kindly. He did an immense quantity of journalism of the unattached variety, and gradually achieved a position more or less assured.

When he had been at it five or six years—at the time when this history of an episode opens—he was making an income sufficient for his needs, which, if they were not particularly modest, were certainly not extravagant.

He was popular among his fellows, though the more seriously-minded among them always felt that an excess of seriousness was his especial bane. There were women—chiefly married—who liked him; and children took to him instinctively. He had sometimes been regarded as fickle and changeable, by people

who did not understand that there are cases in which a change of this kind cannot be proven by any reference to the actions of the person accused, since a man's actions are often but desperate concealments of his motives.

For the rest, he had already published his second book, and again achieved a success with the critics which the public had yet to ratify. A third was on the verge of publication.

Finally, he was eight-and-twenty, or somewhere thereabouts, and, to all appearances, London held no more willing prisoner.

CHAPTER II.

HOLDEN had a few hours of sleep and then arose and went about the ordinary business of the day. Most of the time he spent at work in his rooms, and these hours were more than usually unproductive.

The flowers upon his table reminded him continually of the man he had talked with in Covent Garden, and of the evident delight he took in his occupation of gardener. After all, the old man had every reason to feel and to express his delight. It was altogether a more notable achievement to have multipled daffodils and gay scarlet anemones upon the face of the earth than to have written even the best book of which one might conceivably be capable. Moreover, it was never permitted to any man to see his name upon the title-page of that book.

In the evening he dined at a crowded little restaurant with a friend, Teddy Lancaster,

After much talk on subjects of no particular importance he spoke the thing that was in his mind.

"I've issued a manifesto, Teddy," he said.

Teddy twinkled behind his *pince-nez*. "Another?" he said simply.

Holden sipped his liqueur. "I fancy I've said it before," he said reflectively. "It's the old complaint: that this life is not worth while. Except for the half-hour after dinner, one might add, of course."

"Lord!" said Teddy. "And will some one publish that?"

Holden disregarded the interruption. "I can see well enough that life might be very tolerable if it were possible to live it on one's own terms. But this particular kind of life somehow sickens me. Sooner or later—I wish I thought it would be soon—I shall chuck it."

"All roads lead to Waterloo Bridge," said Teddy flippantly; "but talk as much as you like. What is the particular grievance now?"

"My dear fellow," said Holden, "suicide is very often the last resort of life's truest lovers, but Heaven forbid I should go that way. It is London I would pitch overboard, for the simple reason that to exist in London I must practically deny myself the privilege of living. For what London gives me as the reward of my devotion

is nothing. I do not want to hear before it gets into the papers what is the latest *bon mot* of the newest jester; I do not want to see the newest play, or to be an adept in music halls. I don't much care whether the last bad book sells or not, or whether it is damned by the critics, or praised to the skies. Give me a week away from London, and I'll forget them all, and need them no more than I shall need an evening paper. But here I must be interested in them all because there is nothing else to do."

"All this should make an article," said Teddy, "and I never read the weekly journals. But continue."

"Well, then," said Holden, "the point of my objection is this. Being what I am and in London, I must spend a certain amount of money in necessary things: dinners, cabs, theatres, clothes — even my chambers. I haven't the faculty of living on my debts, and therefore am driven to do ten times the amount of work I should need to do if I lived otherwise, and all of it of the sort that a man would never dream of doing except for money. Such work is the only labour. The money brings me the privilege of living my present life in London— the only life I can like in London; which, to be frank, I value at nothing at all. For there is no pleasure I buy here for which I should

not get a more excellent substitute at no cost of labour if once I had the sense to take my freedom."

"One would think," said Teddy, "that you had been in town a twelvemonth, and raved against London just because you felt yourself becoming acclimatised. Men do. I did three or four stories, some articles, and no end of verses at that stage. The money they brought me made my chambers so delightful that I could not take a holiday, and so vexed all my people at Christmas. It must be sad to be one of the mob, whose emotions are emotions only, and not copy also. But don't pretend that you have yearnings after the country. The return to nature is not for you."

For some minutes a waiter had been hovering about in the vicinity of the corner they occupied. "They want our table," said Holden.

He paid the waiter, and they went out together into the street. It was raining heavily, as it had rained all the day through. Teddy Lancaster had to go to a newspaper office, and the two parted immediately, Holden walking down to his rooms.

He was still filled with a sense of revolt. The article he had revised on the previous night was in all essentials one he had written and seen published many times before. But

this re-incarnation of his old ideas had resulted from a more than ordinarily strong fit of disgust with London. He knew perfectly well that the mood would pass in a day or two, and that he would be at least passively reconciled to what he now hated. But this self-knowledge did not serve to quiet him, for he could not convince himself that his present discontent was not the only mood of wisdom. He felt, also, that the change which it dictated was now possible to him. Later on, he might still have his periods of rebellion, but he would have become so thoroughly sodden with London air that to act upon his moods would be to invite and ensure disaster.

One verse, of all that he had read, came back to him, and as he sat smoking he repeated it so often, and with so complete an unconsciousness, that it seemed to be the voice of his own longing :

I will arise and go now, for always, night and day,
I hear lake-water lapping with low sounds on the shore ;
As I stand in the roadway, or on the pavement grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

Gradually the verses did form themselves into his own resolve. He would leave London, abandon the labour of work done merely for the sake of money, and seek those natural pleasures for which man, desiring to make heavier the

original curse, had sought out substitutes whose only merit was that they were purchased at the price of enslavement. He would go away to some place where men lived simply and came face to face with naked nature; the air would be cool and cleansing, and the smell of the earth make the nights fragrant if he should choose to wander late. He did not think it would ever seem worth while to write again: but if the mood took him he would write. In any case there would be no lack of occupation.

His resolve had grown suddenly out of his discontent, but at first it was so indefinite that, knowing himself, he feared it might evaporate with the fatigue that sleep would cure. He had always hated making definite plans, but he now saw that if he would compel himself to act wisely he must overcome this natural infirmity.

His eyes fell upon the daffodils loosely put together in a jar upon his table. He remembered the shrewd, honest face of the man Cunnack whom he had met in Covent Garden, and his words concerning Scilly: "acres o' lilies under a sky that's never long without the sun, and the very sea air smellin' o' sweet flowers." And in a moment his resolve was made. He would quit London immediately, and his experiment of simpler life should be made at Scilly, with the sea always at hand and

flowers everywhere. No place could be better fitted for such a trial, and if it proved a failure he could come back and forget that he had ever fancied himself possessed of the secret of wisdom. Then having pledged himself to a definite course of action, he sought his bed, assured that he should sleep.

The days that followed were filled with a growing excitement. He had never been accustomed to announce his movements, and had already earned a certain reputation for eccentricity by sudden departures from his wonted haunts. Even now, when he imagined himself to be leaving London finally, he did not deem it necessary to explain his intentions.

He had to examine his belongings, and choose out those of them which would be essential to him in the future. Most of his books he rejected, for most of them dealt with matters that would no longer concern him. His furniture, some of it good, and the little rarities in china which he had collected mainly because it was the thing one did when situated as he was, he disposed of without a pang. Indeed, he even found himself wantonly sacrificing more things than one for no better reason than the pleasure he had in feeling that these, which had been more than essential, had become of no consequence at all.

Then he went the round of certain ancient

haunts, and enjoyed them with hardly less keenness than he had done when first he made their acquaintance. Still the reason was the same: there had been occasions beyond number when they had failed to amuse and distract him. Now he was going away to a simpler life, and would depend on simpler things for the pleasures he should desire.

Somehow, he had never before realised the magnificence of London as he did in these last days. The pageant of the streets—that living dream-picture which includes the whole of life—had never seemed so keenly interesting. He did not wonder that some men never awoke to wisdom as he had done; and there were moments when he almost envied them. But his resolve was fixed, and he looked forward with a fervid eagerness to the hour when his experiment should begin.

Even at the last he chose to see the city at its best, and so he took the night mail from Paddington. As he drove to the station there were lights innumerable, the noise of wheels, moving crowds, and the roar of life. He leant forward in his hansom and watched, remembering nights when he had come back after a few weeks of absence and felt that London was the only place where a man may call himself at home. He watched with the same excited interest now, seeing more that was notable from

his cab than one would usually observe in a whole week of desultory wandering. But it was a desire to reckon up and know the things he was so gladly abandoning that made him thus eagerly observant.

In the train he slept. When he awoke he was at Plymouth. The newspapers were on sale, and the dawn began to appear. There was already an exquisite freshness in the air, and as he paced the platform he felt a new life moving in his veins. The Tamar, when they crossed it, was still veiled in mist, and afterwards, as they went through Cornwall, there were mists above the woods that lined the valleys. But the sunlight made them splendid, striking through them from the east, and the bare woodlands had already a vague promise of the spring. Even the fulness of day, when the train went slowly through regions desolated and defaced by the works of mines long since abandoned, did not dissipate his feeling of delight. A blithe wind was blowing inland as they passed through the marshes of Marazion, the brown sedge was swaying, and the water ruffled and blue. The sea was breaking exultantly in splendid green, and further out the blue of it was flecked with white. Everything lived. Even St Michael's Mount looked picturesque, the sunlight brightening its coat of brown fern. Holden

was almost regretful when the train stopped under the shelter of a massive granite wall against which the waves were breaking high, and he knew that this part of his journey was ended.

CHAPTER III.

AT the hotel he breakfasted in a room which overlooked the sea; the sight increased his impatience, and he was early on board the little steamer that was to take him to Scilly. One can imagine an Algerine slave escaping out of captivity with very much the emotions he experienced as the little steamer moved away from Penzance. It was rough, and there were few passengers. Holden stopped on deck and looked for the apparition of the islands.

Presently they appeared, and gradually the steamer beat her way through the rough water towards them. It found a passage among scattered islands, low-lying, many-coloured, and gentle of curve, and so gained the harbour they enclose and protect. The steamer presently put in at a decent granite pier, on which a little crowd of islanders awaited its arrival, and Holden had reached the end of his journey.

He went through the town—a fishing-town of cleaner, wider streets—to his hotel.

He remembered the island as one of gently-curving hills covered with delicious turf, with boulders of grey-lichened granite everywhere protruding. In waste places there were jonquils growing, and huge geranium plants covered the white fronts of the cottages. In some of the gardens there were gigantic aloes; hardly a wall had not its thick cloak of clambering ice-plant. There were shops in the village, but he could hardly fancy they were ever the scene of business transactions.

While first he lived there he had a continual sense of dwelling insecurely on the smallest imaginable space of earth in the midst of illimitable seas. But gradually the charm of the place mastered him, and when he had gone from it he called to mind a little island, lost in the sea, indeed, but magically secluded from storm and wreck and all the sea's old horrors.

Never any storm can reach
This our island in the sea,
Where, upon the shining beach,
Light waves murmur restfully.

Here we dream the livelong day
In the sunlight, and forget
Cares of earth left leagues away,
Joys that lie beyond regret.

Call no more! No voice can reach
Our dim island in the sea:
Once we gained the murmurous beach,
Lost to love and life were we.

He went to the hotel, watching everything as he went with an eager delight. A certain touch of the locality in the speech of those who came to attend to his wants was as delicious to him as a hint of peat-fragrance in country cream. But he could not begin to rest yet. His journey would not be ended until he had found a place in which to lodge, and made it his by disposing in it such of his belongings as he had brought along with him.

He ate his lunch, and then the memory of his friend of Covent Garden came to him. He made inquiries as to his place of abode, and set forth to find him.

The sunlight was warm and bright. There were daffodils in every garden, and here and there he caught sight of a long, low glass house standing in the eye of the sun. He had the heart of a boy again as he went onward.

John Cunnack's house was a big thatched cottage with white-washed earthen walls. There were pink monthly roses clambering up its front, and stray flowers in the garden. A low, broad hedge parted it from the road, and over this the heavy ice-plant hung almost to

the ground. He opened the gate, and stepped across the garden to the open door. He knocked and waited.

The door opened into a great kitchen its brick floor neatly sanded, and on the dresser a big array of china-ware. Holden was charmed with the place. He knocked again, and shifted his feet on the granite door-stone, and immediately he heard footsteps on the stairs.

In another moment a girl appeared, and before she had said a word he recognised in her the niece of whose longing to see London Cunnack had spoken. She was young—he could hardly fancy her much beyond seventeen—and, for all the healthiness of her life, her face was very pale. Her eyes were quick and grey; he had not been speaking with her long before he perceived that she had a pretty trick of looking up under her lashes with a delightful smile. For the rest, she wore a thin frock of softened scarlet, like the tint of a field of poppies seen from a long way off. On her head was an odd little brown cap, made of the husk that grows about the base of palm-trunks in foreign parts. It had been the offering of a lad of the place who had come home from his first voyage mindful of his old devotion. Long after, Elsie confessed to Holden that she had not permitted herself to

show her liking of the thing by wearing it until the giver had gone back to the sea, and his rivals began to hope he was forgotten.

She looked at Holden now inquiringly.

"Does Mr Cunnack live here?" asked Holden. "Is he at home?"

"This is his house," said the girl, "but he's out in the glass-house with the flowers. Do you want to see him?"

"I should like to," said Holden.

"Then I'll take you out to him," said the girl. She walked in front of him, swinging in her hand the brown cap which she had taken off. There had been just a trace of rusticity in her accent, but she spoke with a cool self-possession that amused the stranger, who was mainly impressed with her youth.

John Cunnack's house stood at the top of a slight declivity that looked towards the south. Behind the house was a small garden shut in by a hedge of dark green escalonia; there was an opening in the hedge which gave upon the flower-grounds. The bulbs that were to flower in February and March were planted in the open in between the hedges of escalonia; already there were stray blooms opened before the proper season. Two long, low houses held the flowers which came earlier, making an untimely spring at Christmas-time.

To one of these two houses the girl led

Holden. He saw Cunnack working within it, a boy acting under his directions. When she opened the door he stood amazed for a moment. There was a narrow way left open down the side of the house. On either side of it were innumerable flowers, golden or silvery-white, opening in boxes. At the further end of the house, in beds on either side of the central way, was a thick forest of arum lilies. The air was warm and moist, and laden with the heavy odour of sweet-scented jonquils.

Cunnack turned towards the door. Holden moved forward and saw that he was not completely recognised. "I met you a few weeks ago in Covent Garden, Mr Cunnack," he said. "I have come over to see if all you said in praise of Scilly is true."

The flower-grower smiled delightedly, his shrewd yet simple face all wrinkles. "Ah," he said, "I knew I'd seen 'ee before. Well, now, to think you should put so much as that upon my words! 'Tis common enough for people to come from up the country in the summer, but in the winter is another thing." He turned to the girl who had led Holden hither. "Elsie," he said, "this gentleman is a Londoner come to see what Scilly is like." Then to Holden: "Come to think upon it, I must ha' told you I had a little niece that was all the time daggin' to go to London? Elsie's

the one; and she's a Londoner by birth, too, though one of Scilly by living in it."

Elsie and Holden looked at one another without speaking.

"I suppose you're stoppin' up to Tregarthen's?" asked Cunnack.

"Well," said Holden, "I am there for the present. But I want to get lodgings. I suppose one can?"

"Aw," said Cunnack, "so you're going to stop in Scilly over a day or two? Yes, I suppose there won't be any trouble for 'ee to get lodgings. Now, if only Jane was here she would be able to tell 'ee where to go. Where is your aunt, Elsie?"

"She went down town just now," said Elsie, in her pretty soft voice. "She ought to be back by this time. Shall I see if she's in the house?"

Before Holden could object she had gone. "That's the little niece I told 'ee of," said Cunnack, watching her. "She's a daughter to a brother of mine that went to London in a situation and married a poor sort of woman. He died very soon after, and while he lay ill the woman went off. So I went up and brought home the child to Scilly, and she're lived here ever since, for close on twenty year."

Holden made no remark, and the flower-

grower continued: "goin' to stop in Scilly long, are you?" he asked.

"I've no idea," said Holden. "But I grew tired of London, and hope to stay over here a long time."

At this moment Mrs Chegwidden, Cunnack's widowed sister and housekeeper came. She was a stout, motherly woman, with a taste for bright colours and a habit of speaking her mind.

"This gentleman's a friend from London," said Cunnack. "He do want to find lodgings somewhere, for he's going to stop a brave long time. I told 'en you would know all about it."

"Yes," said Mrs Chegwidden, "no doubt I can tell him." She looked at Holden very carefully; she was "taking the average of him," as she afterwards confessed.

"I suppose you'd want a bedroom and a sitting-room?" she asked presently.

"I suppose so," said Holden.

Mrs Chegwidden looked at her brother inquiringly. "We haven' ever had reg'lar lodgers," she said presently, "not even in the summer. But two or three years ago there was a artis' came in the place, and nothing would satisfy 'en but he must lodge here. Would 'ee like to try it again, Cunnack?"

Cunnack knew quite well that he was not expected to have any choice in the matter, and

understood that Holden had met with his sister's approval.

"'Tis exactly as you and the gentleman do arrange between you," he said.

Mrs Chegwidden turned to Holden. "Would 'ee like to see the house?" she said. "'Tis very coosy, but a rig'lar ol' ramble. You'd better see what you think of it."

Holden followed her gladly. "I had hoped I might find a home somewhere where they grew flowers," he said, as they returned towards the house. Elsie had stopped behind in the greenhouse, but she presently reappeared.

The house merited the description Mrs Chegwidden had given it. It was a place of immense solidity, the walls being mostly made of that mixture of mud and straw which is called cob. They were gigantically thick, so that the window of the little room which she suggested might make his bedroom had an inner sill close upon three feet in breadth. The white-washed ceiling showed the beams, evidently salvage from some wreck of bygone days. A scrap of carpet seemed an insult to the exquisite cleanliness of the floor, whose "planching" was all ribbed by much scrubbing. As for the sitting-room, it opened out of the big kitchen; the window looked on the garden. Holden looked out of it and saw Elsie coming

in her pretty frock through the opening in the dark hedge of escalonia.

He turned to Mrs Chegwidden. "The rooms are delightful," he said. "I should like to come here beyond all things, if you will take me."

Mrs Chegwidden smiled her satisfaction. "'Tis coosy enough," she said, "though some might call it an old ramble. Shall us go down and tell Cunnack 'tis all agreed?"

They stepped out into the kitchen, where Elsie was arranging some cut flowers in a blue and white mug. "After all," said Mrs Chegwidden, "I mustn' lose time; I must get the rooms ready for 'ee and put the bedding to air. So, Elsie, you're better to take the gentleman down to tell uncle 'tis all settled. You never told me your name," she added, turning to Holden.

"My name is Holden," he answered, as he followed Elsie.

The girl did not now precede him in silence. They were no sooner in the garden than she turned and spoke: "You won't stay long," she said.

Holden laughed. "Is that your welcome?" he said. "I mean to stop a very long time. I have no thoughts of going back."

The girl looked at him curiously. "You won't stay long," she repeated. "There is always more for a man to do than a girl can

find. But if the place is like a prison sometimes to me, who never knew a better, what will it be to one that knows London?"

"My dear child," laughed Holden involuntarily. Then, seeing he had vexed her, he began again. "Indeed," he said, "it is my knowledge of London which is going to make me infinitely content with Scilly."

Elsie did not answer, but her opinion was manifestly unaltered. By this time they had reached the green-house. Cunnack looked up inquiringly.

"Well," he said, "what do 'ee think of it?"

"I like the rooms immensely," said Holden. "I hope to take them, if you are agreed."

Once again the flower-grower showed a face all wrinkles. "'Tis no affair of mine," he said. "I suppose Mis' Chegwidden is willing, or she would have sent 'ee elsewhere at the beginning. So you can tell your friends you've changed your address, I reckon."

Holden's face showed his satisfaction. "My friends can wait," he said. "They are not so numerous, and are not likely to be curious. But I must tell the people at the hotel."

"Aw," said Cunnack, "there's no need for you to trouble. The boy can go with a barrow and fetch away your luggage."

"I'm afraid there's more than a barrow-load," said Holden.

Cunnack smiled. "Then I suppose you're come meaning to stop a bra' long time," he said. "Well, the boy can take the little cart, and we shall have all the more time to make acquaintance of one another. I'm none so fond of your flying visitors, that do come by one boat and go back by the next."

The boy went off to the hotel, Elsie having despatched him. Holden stopped behind and talked with Cunnack. His whole life hitherto had been a sort of training of his curiosity, and he had very soon acquired a singularly correct, if equally superficial, knowledge of the trade which Cunnack followed. He had the journalist's faculty of getting from a man just those little facts which ought to elude the merely superficial person. When Elsie came back at the end of an hour he realised with a sudden sense of vexation that he had not yet shaken off the shackles of London.

"Will Mr Holden take tea by himself?" she asked.

Cunnack looked at her with puzzled face; then he laughed.

"'Tis a curious thing," he said to Holden, "but that's the first time I've heard your name spoken, and I seem to know 'ee better already. Will 'ee take your tea by yourself, or along with me, and Mrs Chegwidden, and Elsie."

Holden did not hesitate for a moment. "It is as you like," he said. "But I am all for taking it with you if you don't mind."

The flower-farmer was manifestly pleased at the decision. "It is what I would choose myself," he said heartily. "I hate a stranger in the house, if he do stop a stranger after the first half-hour. Elsie, run in and tell aunt that Mr Holden 'll take his tea along with us."

Elsie went with a flutter of scarlet. It was evident she approved his choice, and Cunnack turned from his work with a face inexpressibly friendly.

"Well," he said, "do 'ee wonder now that when you saw me in London I was longin' to be back in Scilly?"

"I am envying you already," said Holden.

"Ay," said Cunnack. "The father of us all was a gardener—God's gardener, you might say—and since his time there's been no man altogether happy. There's hindrances appointed—weeds do grow where the good corn is planted, and there's no end to the multitude of blights and cankers. But 'tis good to be a gardener still. 'Tis a calling the Lord Hisself might almost envy: to live among the flowers and do the best you can for them, and see your work come out each morning in fresh beauty. For Adam's sake there's nothing can be perfect:

often enough a healthy bud 'll open and the full bloom be somehow disappointing. But still 'tis good to look at, if only one didn' think of others that are better. And there's none can take such credit to himself as the gardener. I was never married—I wanted what I couldn' have—and that's a great thing to have missed. For a wife is like sunshine in the house, and there's many have cause to be thankful that He maketh His sun to shine with the same warmth on them that's good and them that isn' very good. That I missed; yet sometimes, when I'm down here workin', I do wonder if I can say that I am childless. Do 'ee know what I mean? But there, 'tis foolishness I'm talkin'."

"Not that," said Holden. "The wisest would be first to call you brother, if you told him. And you are a man to be envied greatly; we all of us—

Would something make,
And joy in the making.

You gardeners come nearest achieving your desire."

Cunnack listened with interest. "Do 'ee think so, sure 'nough?" he said. "Well, I can't but say I'm well content. There must be many now, in places where flowers don't grow by nature, that know there's an old man down

here by the name of Cunnack who's all the time making flowers to grow for their delight. And sometimes I think, too, that the gardener is like old Abraham, inheriting the same promise."

"Abraham?" interjected Holden, not understanding.

"I work here among the flowers, and because of me the bulbs are multiplied and the seeds stored. And sometimes I could almost fancy a world all flowers, because an old gardener, that will be forgotten then, worked in this bit of ground. 'Thy seed shall inherit the earth.' And there's a child's fancy—something Elsie said when she wadn' but three year old—comes back to me sometimes. She wanted to know if the spirits of dead flowers would bloom again in Heaven. I believe 'twas I that wondered whether the spirits of dead gardeners would be left to tend them there."

"Is that a dream of Elsie's?" asked Holden. "Poets and children have the same thoughts, for children are all poets. A poet had that flower-fancy thousands of years ago, and he made a race accept it. He pictured the dead as walking forever in meadows full of flowers. And the flowers were daffodils."

"Now, there," said Cunnack delightedly. "So Elsie had the same thought as the old poet. Can 'ee mind any more of his fancies?"

"There is the tale of the first daffodil," said

Holden. "I think it must have been his." He went on to give a version, more or less fanciful, of the story of Narcissus, whom Echo loved vainly. At first he told it as altogether an old tale, but he grew interested presently, for Cunnack had the child's simplicity, and listened as a child listens to a fairy tale. He regarded his flowers with novel interest, and mourned over the sorrows of Echo, murmuring, "Poor maid! Poor maid! So that's how the Echo came to be!"

And while they were still talking, Elsie appeared and called them into the house.

They had tea together in the great dark kitchen. A fire of furze-faggots burned upon the huge open hearth, and a pleasant fragrance was in the air. Mrs Chegwidden had baked a most delicious cake among the embers, and once again the journalist in Holden awoke. He could by no means be satisfied until she had told him all she knew of brandice, of baking-iron, and of the divers cakes and pies prepared by their means. The actual facts were supplemented by many anecdotes; mostly of people whose names were followed in the narration by the remark: "She's dead now, poor dear: dead this long time." And so Mrs Chegwidden held the field and talked at large. Had he desired, and been deliberately seeking, to win her devotion, Holden could hardly have

hit upon a more excellent method of procedure than this exhibition of natural curiosity.

Elsie did not talk much. When the meal was ended she disappeared, and later in the evening Holden heard Mrs Chegwidden talking to her with some severity in the kitchen.

He had been busily occupied in arranging his books and other belongings. He had found the flowers, which he had seen Elsie arranging in the blue and white mug, set in the centre of his table. He saw now, upon investigation, that the mug was a delightful piece of Spode. It was not long after nine when there came a knock at his door, and Cunnack appeared.

"I came to say good-night," he said. "We are early folk here, but if you care to sit up don't trouble about us. The day of judgment would hardly wake me, once I was asleep."

Holden looked at his watch and laughed aloud. "After all," he said, "I believe you are right, though I don't remember going to bed at this hour. I will follow your example."

A few minutes later he was getting into bed, and wondering, as he reviewed the events of the day, why it was to him alone of all his acquaintances that the secret of wisdom had been revealed. He thought of the great gas-lit city which had hardly begun its night as yet, And when his light was out and he lay awaiting

sleep it seemed to him that he had come to a region of such restful quiet as he had not hitherto imagined to exist on this side of the grave. He could not sleep for listening to it.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN it was all over Holden's memories were not so much of individual days as of exquisite scenes in which he had had a part. He had come to the islands at the right moment for learning the lovely secrets of the flower-farm, and for a month or two required no other occupation. Everything went as he had fondly hoped. Even the few books which he had chosen for their enduring qualities stood neglected upon his shelves, for, with infinite leisure, he had neither the time nor the desire to read them. He rose early and went early to bed, and during the day his interests were all with the affairs of real life: the business of the flower-farm, and the other activities of the folk among whom he had come to dwell.

At first he was a spectator only; almost every day bringing him the delight of making new acquaintances among the flowers, and, what was not less pleasant, of cultivating the

friendship which had sprung up betwixt him and Cunnack. Gradually, however, he began to take some little part in the actual work, and his devotion could scarcely have been greater had he been an apprentice eager to learn the trade and arrive at the point where labour begins to be wage-bearing.

"Have I the makings of a gardener in me, do you think?" he asked one day.

"The makings?" echoed Cunnack. "Ay, and more than that. You've lived all your days in great cities, but when the Lord made 'ee, He made a gardener. 'Tis little you have learnt as yet, but you had the love of it from the first, and for that reason you'd find the flowers like human creatures, answering to care as little children answer to a smile or a kind word. Yes, you've the makings of a gardener in 'ee, right enough."

Holden was pleased at this testimony to an extent which altogether surprised him.

"Well," he said, "I've told you it was your daffodils that brought me to Scilly. My one idea was to get away from London, and they alone suggested my coming west. Perhaps, by a chance I have found my proper calling at last."

With Elsie he progressed less rapidly, but he did progress. One day she was engaged, along with Cunnack and the boy, in gathering such of

the flowers as had reached the stage in which they needed to be picked. Holden stood and watched for some time. Then he advanced to where she was standing, her fingers busy among the flowers.

"Can I help?" he said. "If there's one thing more delightful than another 'tis being allowed to gather flowers. Other details of the work are well enough, but to gather the blooms is the consummate privilege of gardeners."

"Privilege?" cried Elsie. "But I can fancy the idle man finds work a privilege now and again. You'd better go on watching; 'tis a thing you do well."

"Do they give you Mill to read in Scilly?" asked Holden. "Surely one needn't confine himself to making legs of chairs—if that is the example you remember—over here? Besides, I have watched."

"Then you should want no teaching to be able to help. Only, be careful that the buds are grown to the right stage, or they will only die. Watch a little longer until you are sure."

"I will do both together," said Holden, as he began to work. And from this time forth a share in the delightful labour of picking was his also.

Once they had been gathered the blooms were left in a warm place to stand for a while in tepid water. At first, while only indoor

plants were flowering, and the yield was comparatively small, the containing vessels stood in the greenhouses, making the free space even narrower than it usually was. But when the hardier bulbs, which had been planted in the open, began to give their harvest, there was need of a wider store-room, and the great kitchen was used. Every vessel that could be made to hold water—from a washing-tray to a hand-basin or a big, red, earthenware "bussa"—was brought into requisition, until there was hardly space to move in the huge, shadowy room.

A multitude of pictures from this time printed themselves indelibly on Holden's memory; and Elsie in her frock of scarlet and coquettish palm-swathe cap stood in the foreground of them all. He remembered a beautiful grey day when he had come to the door of the greenhouse and looked down the length of it over the mingled gold and silver of the crowded blooms, to where she was leaning to gather one which escaped her; how, presently, she had glanced in his direction as she captured it, and smiled prettily. Once he had come suddenly from his room into the kitchen, and seen her standing, like Spring caught unawares, amid the pale flowers packed in tubs and basins betwixt him and her. In the moment before she spoke it came on him to wonder a little as to the memories on which she

had manifestly been dwelling. Then there were evenings when he watched her sorting the flowers into bunches of a dozen and neatly tying them, so that they might be packed in their wooden boxes in good time for the steamer that should convey them to the mainland on the morrow.

In this work, also, he became her assistant.

From the first, or from the time when she ceased to regard him as altogether a stranger, he found Elsie vastly amusing. He knew that she was older than he had judged her at first sight, but found it not easy to modify his judgment because of correcter knowledge. He still fancied her a child, and that mainly because, as with all children, her charm consisted in the delightful frankness of her unconscious revelations of herself.

He very soon came to receive a good deal of her confidence. At first she merely questioned him about London, listening eagerly to all his descriptions of the life he had left behind him. He described it, having got his freedom, with the proper enthusiasm, and it was not long before he had realised her absolute inability to understand why he had been willing to abandon the delights for which she hungered. And so he took to explaining what had been his reasons for retreat, and how it had come about that he had ended by finding London intolerable.

One evening Cunnack, whom the day's work had made quite inexplicably tired, went off to his bedroom as soon as tea was over. "I can't think how 'tis," he said: "I've done nothing that's worth naming, and yet I'm rig'lar wore out." Mrs Chegwidden having finished her work, had gone into the village to call on a friend who was in trouble through the sickness of her husband. Elsie and Holden had the kitchen to themselves.

"Don't you ever find it slow here, with nothing to do all day, and nowhere to go?" the girl asked presently, bending down to remove a withered narcissus from a big jug.

"Slow?" cried Holden. "Why, I have never done so much in all my days as I do here. Up there I wrote, and wrote, and wrote, but until I came here I had forgotten for a year or two that a man should sometimes find time to live a little on his own account."

"Ah," said Elsie, "I don't understand you. I should have said that work and life went together."

"Oh, *work* . . . ." cried Holden. "But mine was mere labour. If I could have been climbing new peaks in Darien all day it would have been another matter, but my exercise was on the treadmill. I had to write, and write, and write——"

"You like writing?" interjected Elsie.

"And for that very reason hated above all things to do so at the command of another, merely that I might exist until the next day should bring me another command, not a whit less odious. No, I am living here. There I endured penal servitude while the prison-door was open and close at hand. Why, if ever I had got to heaven out of London, I should have been sent back again to learn something of life and the earth: to find out that even here there are such places as Scilly and such trades as your uncle's."

To this and many other deliverances of the same kind Elsie listened with the utmost patience, rarely venturing any particular comment. Again and again he strove to make the matter plain to her, much as a man full of some great invention of his own might do with a child if it seemed intelligent and there was no one else at hand to confide in. Above all, he strove to impress upon her the one very vital article in his private creed: that which insisted on the folly of all labour undertaken for the sake of such things as are not absolutely necessary to comfortable life. And he sincerely believed that she had perceived the justice of his views, inasmuch as she listened patiently and made no attempt to controvert them. That, after all, as he might have realised, was no part of her business—yet. If he had once

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begun to regard the matter with any attention, he might also have wondered what it was inspired him with anything beyond a merely conventional anxiety to have her opinions coincide with his.

Presently, as they became more and more frequently companions in the work of the flower-farm, Elsie, began to take a more active part in their conversations. It was her turn to submit to him the "reflections" which she had felt moved to write upon the margins of the book of life so far as it had been shown her. There were seasons when she found existence not altogether unamusing, even in Scilly. She was not peculiarly, or, perhaps, not very obviously, pretty; young men who followed after her did so not through the attraction of any describable feature, but simply because she was herself. It would have been impossible to imagine a photograph that should be like her; and the only artist who could have painted her would have been one who had not seen her for a twelvemonth, yet had reasons for remembering. Perhaps a touch of coldness in her was at the root of the whole matter; she had a magnificent disdain of the so-called great passions when she had aroused them, and there were seasons when she talked with an exquisite self-possession of the whole masculine race as including none but children, and those foolish.

Holden found her singularly fascinating in these moods ; she was a child, and yet her talk—which amounted to nothing more definite than the indication of a point of view—might have fallen from the lips of a person old and experienced beyond human possibility in the ways of men.

They were talking one evening, as they sat at tea in the kitchen, concerning a man of the island whose business had come near to ruin by reason of his incompetence, and had been saved only through the tact and energy of his wife. Mrs Chegwidden told the tale, but at the end Elsie spoke, with a little air of uttering her own thoughts quite unconsciously.

"There's a deal of foolishness among men," she said, "and a wonderful deal of good nature. I could name a score of things that are always left to men which any woman would do better."

Her eyes fell. Cunnack laughed at her wisdom, and Holden asked promptly: "You would have it always Leap Year, amongst other things?"

For a moment Elsie's mouth twitched silently. Then she flashed a quick glance across at him under her lashes. "I've heard say it is that already; but never a woman will confess it, and men have never found it out."

"Now where did'st learn that?" cried Mrs Chegwidden. "I mind that when John first

came courtin' me. . . . But there, 'twould vex him, poor dear, if I should say so, even in his grave. But there's truth in it; a deal o' truth."

Thereupon she searched her memory for rustic anecdotes in support of Elsie's allegation, reminding her brother in parenthesis of the living and dead relations of the persons concerned, their dwelling-places, avocations, and the broad facts of their histories. And while she was still talking Elsie rose and went upstairs. When she reappeared she had donned her hat and cloak.

"Where be 'ee off to?" asked Mrs Chegwidden.

"Oh," said Elsie, "out for a bit. 'Tis a lovely night." She shut the door behind her and disappeared.

Holden wished she had not chosen that moment for her departure. He found Mrs Chegwidden's anecdotes a trifle wearisome, and presently made an excuse to return to a little article he had been writing earlier in the day. He heard Elsie return, but kept his room and did not see her again until the morning.

CHAPTER V.

ONE day, when the spring was wellnigh over, Holden stood at the gateway talking to Elsie, who had followed him from the house. He had been going down into the village when she stopped him with a question; and they lingered talking for a while.

As they did so, a man, whose costume was a shade too obviously that of a holiday-maker, passed the cottage, and, in passing, caught sight of Holden, paused, and seemed about to speak. But he thought better of it and went upon his way.

"Thanks be!" ejaculated Holden.

"You know him?" questioned Elsie, following the departing figure with her eyes.

"In a way," said Holden. "Everyone knows him in London. He's a big man at the music-halls."

"Ah," cried Elsie, with sudden interest,

forgetting the stranger as she turned to her companion. "What is a music-hall like?"

"A place where men, more or less vulgar, sing songs in praise of getting vulgarly drunk, and where women——"

"They are?"

"Oh," cried Holden, "in private life there are no limits to their virtue; the halfpenny papers are full of it. Naturally they don't parade it in public. But you never hear their songs; the orchestra drowns them."

"And there is nothing good in them?"

"Plenty," said Holden; "and even the sixpenny seats recognise it when it comes. The pathetic thing is that even the stalls will sit through the bad to get to it. They want to live, to be amused, in their leisure hours, and this is the best they can do. The gods—if they trouble themselves at all—must weep more at their laughter than at their bitterest sorrows. No; the music-hall proves the case against London, for it is the best and only amusement provided for a vast number of its people."

"The streets?" asked Elsie.

"Ah! The streets are the one show that never palls. And yet——" He laughed as he turned from the gate and went towards the village. "And yet I am well content to be here in Scilly. One does not need amusement, and life is all leisure."

More than once afterwards Elsie returned to the subject, demanding details, and revealing a fund of information, often wholly inaccurate and leading to conclusions altogether erroneous, but still amazing in a child who had lived all her life in Scilly. And he gradually came to understand that the mother whom she had never known, and whom her uncle was very loth to hear mentioned, had been a singer and dancer before her marriage, and had gone back to the old life when the loss of comfort which had accompanied her husband's eventually fatal illness had killed whatever love she may have had for him originally. The knowledge increased his interest in Elsie. It seemed to him that this mother had bequeathed to her little beyond the inborn desire of excitement, which found expression in her constant desire to get to London.

Once or twice a fishing-boat from one of the ports on the mainland called at St Mary's for some reason or another, and Holden made shift to spend a night on board her; for he had not changed altogether in abandoning his old life, and the desire of new experiences was still strong in him. He found a limitless delight in the beauty of the dark sea under the pale stars, the splendour of the fish as they were shaken from the net and strewed the deck, mysteriously glimmering in the blue of the night. On such

occasions he did not sleep. When the nets had been shot, and only one man remained on deck to watch, he would bear him company, and during these vigils he heard many a tale in which, though the telling had been rude and by no means fluent, the very spirit of romance seemed to have been captured. But when the boat touched at the mainland he did not linger, but made all haste to return to Scilly. He was always glad to be back again, and to renew his talks with Elsie.

With Mrs Chegwidden, too, he had many conversations. He had none of the vices of youth as they were known to her, and the fact of his doing no particular work was justified in her view by his having no need to do it. One or two matters were troubling her peace, and she found it a relief to talk of them.

"Cunnack edn' so well as I could wish to see him," she said once. "He's gone old, and tired, and quiet these last few months."

"He has been busy," said Holden, though the same fact had struck him, and made him watch his friend with some anxiety.

"Ay," she answered, "but he was one that never tired very easily. I dunno . . . . his father—who was mine—died of heart-disease when he wadn' much older than John is now."

"A fact to frighten an insurance office," said Holden. "But facts of that kind are often

reassuring to other people. I can't think there can be much wrong with a heart which has beaten so quietly as his has always done."

Mrs Chegwidden had a profound respect for Holden's judgment, and had already consulted him on divers occasions, deeming it essential that in order to help her now he should be acquainted with the events of the past. For Elsie she had a strong affection, tempered by a more than maternal sense of a certain lack of simplicity in the girl that troubled her almost as much as if it had been a want of what is called straightforwardness. She shared, after a fashion, Holden's conviction of his own great age, and already had harrowed him from time to time with many confidences. She began again.

"Do 'ee think so, sure 'nough? Well, maybe you're right. But the thing do trouble me sometimes. I wish Elsie would make up her mind."

She paused for a reply, but Holden was silent.

"There's several she might have, and I used to think she was really a bit fond of Willie Sampson, though you can never tell with Elsie. I know 'twill be a surprise to all when she do make up her mind. But I thought she was beginning to think a little more of Willie than she had ever done of any of the others."

"Yes?" said Holden.

"I had no doubt of it," answered Mrs Chegwidden, "and I wadn' sorry. He is—— But I forgot, you never knew him. He's a young sailor, son to an old sea-captain that's dead these many years. He's second mate on board a vessel now, and lookin' to be first mate next voyage. He's doin' well, as you might say, and they that know him best are most sure that he deserves it."

"He has your support too," said Holden, with a shade of irony.

"That's as it may be. The first duty of we oldsters is to learn that some things are no business of ours. Opinions we can't help having, and I do never set eyes upon a man without taking the average of him from the first moment: so that I should be very sure what I thought in my own mind when Elsie told me the name of the man she had chosen. But unless I was well pleased, or very ill pleased, I should keep quiet. Still, I don't fancy she could do a wiser thing than have Willie Sampson; and I've thought lately that she was coming round to believe the same."

"Lately?" echoed Holden.

"'Tis a little thing enough, but straws 'll show how the wind do blow better than timbern logs. 'Twas he gave her that little brown cap she do wear, and, seeming to me, she've worn it brave an' often lately. But there: when

you've come to my age you'll know that only one thing is safe to say of men and women: that there's never no tellin' what may happen. But I wish Cunnack wouldn' seem so tired all the time."

Holden was a little amused to find that from the time of this conversation he had a distinct feeling of hostility towards the unknown sailor; and that for some days he could not look with all his ancient friendliness on the good woman who had thus confided in him.

Elsie had always a delightful and almost infantile frankness, which—as she may have learned before this—was far more baffling than a common reticence. More than once Holden spoke to her—laughingly, and yet with a certain anxiety underneath—of the sailor, and strove to discover her real feelings on the matter. She told him an amazing deal, but she spoke like a spectator, or a mere reporter, and left him altogether in the dark as to her private emotions. And her lack of reserve reacted upon him, making it exceeding difficult for him to conceal the fact of his interest as he would fain have done.

Once she suddenly broke off in the midst of some narration. "When I am married——" she began.

"You are going to be married, then?" asked Holden.

Elsie laughed, with that old swift, upturned glance beneath her lashes. "One does, sooner or later. And when I am married I shall live in a big town—in London, I hope."

"People who are not wealthy," said Holden, "do not live in London. They simply live in a house or monotonous street which happens to be within—or just outside, the four-mile radius." He went on to conjure up a lamentable vision of the lives of the people who dwell in London on a few hundred a year; of the long, intolerable streets of brick houses all alike, the impossibility of privacy, the constant need of care in money matters. He showed how few pleasures come there (as they do in the country) in the common way of life, and without cost. And once again he wasted his labour in vain.

"That may be," said Elsie. "But you don't understand in the least. All the money in the world wouldn't buy me here the pleasure I should take from the sight and noise of a crowd, and the miles and miles of lighted streets."

Holden gave up the attempt to persuade her, and from that time forth was conscious of an increased dislike of the sailor, of whose presence or absence Elsie's brown cap (which he liked so well) was a perpetual reminder. For he knew that youth is lavish of promise and performance alike, and from many things which the girl herself had told him, he recognised that a much

graver matter than the fact of her desire to live in London would prove no damper to the devotion of the sailor.

About this time, as the actual work of the flower-farm began to grow less with the advance of the season, and Cunnack made preparation for planting potatoes and tomatoes in the forcing houses which were now empty, Holden bethought him of a tale which might some day seem worth the telling. He even wrote some passages, but found it hard to force himself to the hard labour of transcription, and enjoyed the story almost as if it were being told him by a friend in occasional instalments.

And so he drifted and drifted, vaguely conscious at intervals that the circumstances conditioning his experiment had lost something of their original simplicity, but content, upon the whole, to enjoy his life and leave the future unquestioned.

CHAPTER VI.

ELSIE was a continual surprise to Holden. The circumstances of her life had made it impossible that she should have knowledge of certain kinds. But he found reason for wonder, not at her ignorance of things, but rather at her marvellous faculty of assimilating whatsoever scraps of information chance bestowed upon her. Perhaps she also had something of the journalist's trick of seeming to know. Another might have by heart the same facts, but with most people they would have remained isolated, and in their isolation useless. Elsie used everything that came to her.

She had read a great deal, and here again she had not merely made each new book add to her stock of facts, but also had got from it some light as to the things she had already acquired. She charmed Holden by being absolutely incurious as to what he himself had

written; he delighted to wonder whether her attitude was a pose or merely nature, and in the end he decided it was the latter. He was convinced she never would have taken the trouble to conceal her feelings over trifling matters.

He had always had a tendency to like things all the better because he was more or less alone in liking them at all. Elsie's singing charmed him greatly, though it was evident enough to his critical self that neither voice nor method was wholly to be defended. The curious thing about both was this: that they would have been more widely praised had they been more like Elsie herself. She was before all things self-possessed and a little cold. There were moments when, for this reason, her fascination was one almost of repulsion. But, to have heard her sing, a man might have thought her a reed swayed by every wind of passion. Her songs were oddly chosen, and when she sang they seemed to master her, so that, glad or sad, she was for the moment expressing her own feelings, and that less skilfully than she would have done had she felt with less sincerity. Again and again Holden was startled to hear her singing in the distance, then see her and know that she was—what he fancied her.

One day there was a concert in the village, at which Elsie was to sing. It was an affair of

some importance, and a new frock was ordered for the occasion from Penzance. Holden had some slight influence upon the choice eventually made, and the songs upon the programme were those that Elsie sang most prettily. He was a little interested in the affair, and finally went, bearing Elsie company to the concert-room.

They walked slowly, for the night was one of those on which the folk whom it makes happy would fain stop the swinging pendulum of time, and enjoy life with the unprecarious joy of immortals.

"Surely," said Holden, "you are not wanting to be in London now?"

Elsie laughed. "I believe I had forgotten it."

"You would remember this if you were there."

"Perhaps," said Elsie. "But this is the best that Scilly has to give, and a little pain —even a little anger—would utterly spoil it. There, I take it, the common course of life would sometimes make me forget my own small private troubles for a space."

"Will it be Brixton or Herne Hill?" asked Holden, and Elsie laughed gaily, understanding vaguely that his intention was ironical. A moment later they entered the concert-room and parted company.

All St Mary's was there, and there were

faces less familiar, belonging to dwellers in other islands of the group, who had taken this opportunity of visiting their friends or relations. Holden found the preliminaries of the entertainment vastly amusing, and smiled his satisfaction as he realized the change in him which this fact betrayed. In the same mood he quietly fingered his own pulse as the first of the singers mounted the platform, and found it beating with a quiet steadiness that would have frightened him had he observed it in London.

The concert was of the usual kind. Most of the songs were either foolishly sentimental or insanely robustious; and it was these that gained the chief applause. Elsie's songs were two in number, and they barely excited the audience to the formal politeness of an encore. But excitement had made her voice more pleasing than ever to Holden; and he found her very good to look at as she stood in her pretty frock among the flowers and ferns with which the platform had been decorated. She was so young—so utterly a child—and yet so self-possessed. To end with, she sang *Allan Water*—sang it with a passion that might have made a man ask where this child had learned the meaning of heart-break. The clean simplicity of the thing was inexpressibly grateful; it was like a draught of clear, cold, spring water to one who hitherto had found only cloying

syrups wherewith to slake his thirst. Her choice of songs, indeed, was always a little surprising; there was no evident reason why she, too, should not have inclined to the odiously sentimental. And it was always excellently justified.

Holden enjoyed the entertainment greatly. But when it had reached its end his mood changed in a moment. A young man of the island—son of a prosperous flower-grower, and already known as one of her many suitors—advanced to the front of the room and spoke to Elsie. She laughed, and answered him briefly, and presently she left the room in his company. Holden was vexed by the incident itself; but what most of all disturbed him was the fact of an event so trifling having power to affect his peace of mind.

He got away from the crowd outside the room as quickly as was possible. It was a beautiful clear night. The stars were numerous and bright beyond their wont, though a young moon was rising. There was no wind. Listening, he heard a vague, faint noise of the breathing of the sea; a sound that one might always hear if one would listen there in Scilly. Now and again there were voices in the distance, and a sound of laughter from behind the white blinds of a cottage he passed by. Holden wandered by quiet roadways, en-

deavouring to face and comprehend the revelation which had come to him at the end of the concert.

It amounted merely to this: that he was considerably more jealous of Elsie's liberty than would be reasonable in the man whom she should presently recognise as her lover. He did not for a moment imagine that anything would tempt him to betray to her the state of his feelings; he was more or less certain that before long some small thing would disenchant him and make those feelings null. But he was none the less disturbed and angry at the thought that he had not been able to be merely friendly with this pale-faced child of the scarlet frock.

When at last he grew tired of wandering and went back to the house, he found the other occupants seated at the table. Elsie had her back towards him and looked back over her shoulder as he entered. She did not speak, though she had been talking when he lifted the latch; he could not see her face. Her hair glimmered softly against the light. Mrs Chegwidden and the farmer were seated at either end of the table, their faces showing up strongly in the light of the lamp. He came towards them in the shadow, very conscious in himself of what had passed that night.

"You're late," said Mrs Chegwidden. "I

suppose you've been for a stroll. And we was all longin' to hear how you enjoyed the concert, and how Elsie did. We've had her tale, you may be sure, but what did the public think of it?"

Holden passed into his own room, not looking towards Elsie, and saying, as he opened the door, "I thought the concert went excellently, and *Allan Water* was the song of the evening."

"There now, Elsie!" exclaimed Mrs Chegwidden, with delight, "I was sure, in my own mind, that you hadn't done so bad as you made out. I was certain you had done well enough."

Holden moved about in his room, lighting the lamp and getting rid of his hat; he did not hear Elsie's rejoinder, if she made any. A few minutes later he went out and joined the party. Mrs Chegwidden was a companion who made it difficult for a man to be silent when he had matter for talk upon some subject in which she felt an interest. Very quickly he had forgotten his previous state of mind, and was giving her a detailed account of the night's entertainment. It was interrupted and followed by a multitude of questions, many of which bore upon the amusements of people dwelling "up to London"; for Mrs Chegwidden was vastly interested in London.

Once or twice Holden realised that Elsie had less to say upon the matters under discussion than was usual. Once, when he looked in her direction suddenly, it seemed to him that he had caught her in the midst of some most important considerations, having no other than himself for their subject. He turned back to his conversation with Mrs Chegwidden, but not without a momentary wonder as to whether she had in any way guessed at the fact whose discovery earlier in the evening had so surprised and perturbed himself.

When supper was over and Mrs Chegwidden was called from the table by the necessity of household activities, Elsie brought her uncle his pipe, and he retired to the settle by the hearth. Holden went over and talked with him for a few moments, making various inquiries as to the work which was to be done in the next few days, and noting as he talked that the flower-farmer was looking unusually white and fagged. Then he went into his own room and sat down to read over and correct the manuscript of something he had written in the morning.

He had been working for somewhere about ten minutes when there came a knock at the door, and Elsie entered as he looked up. She had a candle in her hand, and this she placed upon his table.

"I brought you the candle," she said, and looked at him with something of the expression he had noted while he was talking to Mrs Chegwidden. He had scarcely time to thank her before she spoke again.

"Did you really enjoy the concert?" she said, and he wondered greatly if the malice of the speech was altogether conscious.

"I've told you I enjoyed it very much," he answered. "Some of the folk were quite good. And you——"

Elsie laughed ever so lightly, and, looking down, smoothed into place a disordered ruffle of her dress. It was all of white, and she was looking younger than ever. She had learned some pretty new trick of arranging her hair.

"And you," said Holden, "were better than I have yet heard you, though I've always praised your singing since you came into the garden singing *The Nightingale* the day after I came here."

"Thank you," said Elsie. "But the people didn't think as you did. 'Twas only for kindness' sake they made me sing again."

"What can you expect?" answered Holden. "You've only to sing them the songs they want—songs treacly-sweet with sentiment—and you will be sure of as much applause as you can desire. But don't!"

"Sentiment!" echoed Elsie with a little laugh. "I'm afraid I must go without applause."

Then Mrs Chegwidden called from without, reminding her that it was very late.

"Good-night," she said, pausing a moment when she had almost shut the door.

Holden sat smoking in his room until long after the sound of footsteps had ceased on the wood floor overhead and the house was quiet. What had happened earlier in the evening still gave him food for reflection, but his mood had changed, and he no longer felt any unwillingness to occupy the position into which he had drifted. For one thing, he still did not think that Elsie knew of it, and, that being so, he trusted to his own inconstancy, in which he had infinite faith, to procure him a way out of the difficulty if he should come to desire it. He had usually found his feelings change of their own accord soon after they had developed strength enough to trouble him.

But he no longer found any cause for trouble in this new feeling towards Elsie. The experiment he had begun in leaving London had gone successfully from the very first; but, though it would make matters more complex, he saw no reason to suppose that he would abandon the hope of further success if he should permit himself to love Elsie.

Looking back, he found many excuses for inclining to the opposite belief. From the first moment of their acquaintance he and Elsie had been the best of comrades, and if a man married he needed rather a comrade than a divinity or a mere housekeeper. He thought, too, that Elsie would understand him, and see the hatefulness of work which is done merely that a man may be in a position to buy a variety of things whereof he has no need at all: things which, even if they were desirable, his constant engagements would leave him no time to enjoy.

And so, as he sat and dreamed, he began to find the immediate future singularly interesting. The thing might die away, as such things do, but there was also a possibility of its developing. He rather hoped it would. Scilly pleased him well enough, and there was no reason why he should not spend the rest of his days there.

It was late when he went to his bedroom; he looked out and saw the young moon mounting high. A cock crowed in the distance; then another, and another.

The old moon brought me joy enough,
The new can bring no sorrow;
Dear, from his store who hath your love
The envious gods might borrow.

He quoted the scrap of verse softly, ending

with a laugh. Then he turned away from the lovely night and sought his bed, his thoughts all of the morrow, and of what it might bring.

CHAPTER VII.

WITHIN the next few days there was no apparent progress. Nevertheless Holden was growing more and more confirmed in the resolve he had made on the night after the concert.

He kept a curious watch on Elsie, and, discount as he might the natural influence of imagination and of the difference in himself, he yet concluded that she had changed in her conduct towards him from that very night. She seemed to avoid him a little, to be perfectly friendly, yet in all their conversations to keep, as it were, a shield of coldness betwixt them, holding him at a distance. Once or twice he found her regarding him with that indefinably new look which he had first observed when he sat at supper after the concert.

And then there arrived a day when she astonished him by an altogether new development. He had told her something of the novel

with which he had been playing for a month or so, and even asked her opinion as to a little incidental problem that he allowed to bother him, though he knew well enough it would quickly solve itself if he once set himself to write the book. That was before he began to understand that she was more to him than a good and very amusing comrade; and she had solved the difficulty very much as he expected to solve it when once he got to work.

Now he happened to have been down into St Mary's one day, and as he made his way homeward he suddenly espied Elsie, going in the same direction, a few score yards in front of him. He hastened his steps, and, overtaking her, walked the rest of the distance at her side. He was still conscious of a change, a new aloofness in her, but presently she spoke the thing which was in her mind.

"Didn't you tell me you had a new novel to write?" she asked.

"Oh," said Holden, "there's a tale I may get done some day."

"Haven't you begun it yet?" persisted Elsie.

"In a sort of way, yes," said Holden. "I've thought about it a good deal, and even written one or two passages. But I've not done much: I am far too well and happy to be able to write with decent comfort."

"But don't you think you ought to work?" said Elsie. "It is little enough you've done since you came to Scilly."

Holden laughed, yet was not altogether pleased. "Must I tell it all over again? I've given up work—with the habit of dining late, and using hansoms, and buying books."

"Every man ought to work," said Elsie with decision. "Surely one should get as big a share as possible of the good things in the world."

"Which one does by escaping at every possible opportunity from the curse which Adam earned for us," said Holden. "Believe me, the good things are not those which one buys. I've found more of them here in Scilly than I should have got for the hardest servitude in London. . . . But I've no doubt I shall do the novel some day."

They had reached the gate, which he now held open.

"I should do it at once, if I were you," said Elsie, as she passed him and entered the house.

Holden went into his room and found the few sheets of the book which he had written so far. The window was up, and the garden invited him with the fragrance of many flowers. "Of the making of many books——" he said. But, none the less, he read through the sheets he had written, and began almost uncon-

sciously to arrange the passages that must follow.

He was amused at Elsie's attempt to regulate his life for him, and still retained an absolute assurance of the wisdom of his own resolve. Nevertheless, he found her interference rather pleasing than otherwise, and indulgently decided he would please her in this small matter. After all, the story he had to tell was one which rather pleased him. He began to write.

After some hours there came a knock at his door. Elsie opened it, and on her entrance seemed a little discomposed to find him apparently engaged in the work she had advised.

"Are you too busy to come to tea?" she asked, and immediately retreated.

Holden finished the sentence he had been writing, and flung down his pen. "I've begun the novel," he said to her as he took his seat. "I am going to work hard at it until I write *Finis* on the last page."

"Ah," said Elsie, dispassionately, and without meeting his glance. "It will be something for you to do."

But he noticed that her face was a trifle flushed, and that she had little to say while the meal was in progress. Mrs Chegwidden more than atoned for the deficiency, being vastly interested in the project.

"If a book was written under this roof," she said resolutely, "I believe I should never rest till I'd read it, though where I should get the time to do it I can't think. I can hardly read my Bible except Sundays, as it is."

Holden had made up his mind; or, at least, he had arrived at a point at which it would have been moderately safe to guess what course he would choose when impulse moved him to action. He worked at his novel again in the morning, the garden with its flowers still tempting him beyond the open window.

Presently Elsie came into the garden.

Holden watched her for a while; then, as she came nearer, he advanced to the window, and spoke.

"Elsie!" he cried, and she came slowly towards him. "You preach well," he said, "and more effectively than those whose trade it is to preach. But it is hard to accept your gospel of work when you yourself are idle."

Elsie laughed. "But the work that I can do is finished. I can do a few things, but when they are done I am bound to be idle."

Holden looked at her in silence with a curious earnestness.

"I have been working as I used to work in town, and yet I have at hand more than all that my labour procured me then. You told me to work."

He ceased. Elsie's eyes were on the ground, and she refused to raise them, though it was evident she was conscious of his gaze.

"I saw no good in it," he said. "If a man were Shakespeare or fit to be Shakespeare's friend, it would be different. But why should a man who can live without labour trouble to write mediocre books for the mere reason that mediocrity sometimes chances to please the great public? I have worked because you told me to work."

Elsie raised her eyes, and swiftly dropped them. "You make much of very little," she answered. "I only said what seemed plain to me: that every man should work. Is there a man that doesn't? And—whatever you may have thought I said—why should you lay such weight on any words of mine?"

Once again Holden was slow to answer; when he spoke it was with a new earnestness. "I began to obey almost without realising why I did so. I thought I would please you, perhaps, and 'tis sometimes pleasant to be commanded, and obey for the mere sake of obeying. But as I worked I knew well enough what was the reason."

"You had a reason, then?" asked Elsie, flushing a little, and still refusing to meet his eye.

"One does not work to order when there's

no great need of work, unless the order is of the sort which it is necessary—or a matter of instinct —to obey."

For a moment Elsie looked at him, glancing swiftly under drooping lashes. "And my orders? But they were not that."

"I found that to give you pleasure was the most pleasant thing open to me. We are all selfish creatures, and so I worked, and I believe the work is good. But there's no use in obeying unless you do care, and will reward obedience. I want you for my wife."

Elsie was silent, but seemed not altogether loth to listen.

"I came here," said Holden, "resolved to live simply and escape the need of labour. But you were here, and so simplicity—which must have been a kind of selfishness—became impossible. I am in your hands. I can only ask you to be my wife."

There was a long silence. Elsie's eyes were downcast, and Holden watched her, eager for her answer, yet wondering, even now, that she had been able to master him so utterly. At last, her eyes still on the flowers, she gave her answer. From the beginning she had been strangely self-controlled, and now there was little change in her.

"'Tis hard to be upon the woman's side," she said. "She must decide at a time she did

not choose, and can't wait until her mind has grown quietly to know itself. I might say 'Yes,' and I might say 'No,' and either way I might come to be sorry after. You want me to marry you? You are sure of that?"

"I am quite sure," said Holden. "It happened almost against my will, but I am more than sure of it."

"Well," said Elsie, "I think . . . but I can't tell you all at once. I must have time. I thought of it, but I could never be sure of myself."

"Tell me later," said Holden. "Tell me——"

"I'll tell you before the day is out," said Elsie. "You do want it?"

"There is nothing else," said Holden as the girl raised her eyes to his.

It was against the rules of the game, but he stretched a hand towards her. Elsie responded, and he had grasped the lithe, cool fingers, before she slipped away and vanished, with a glint of scarlet, through the opening in the dark hedge of escalonia.

Holden turned back to his work not altogether satisfied, yet very far from despairing. He honestly endeavoured to continue with the scene which had occupied his attention when Elsie came into the garden and seduced him from his work. But, somehow, it was not possible to continue. He looked at his watch.

It was but a few minutes after ten, and he realised that Elsie had yet a long time in which to come to a decision and fulfil her promise. He could not go away with the idea of endeavouring to interest himself in a mere fiction while so great a thing was in the balance. And so he left the house and set forth upon a peregrination of the island.

It was an exquisite day; spring having hardly yielded as yet to summer. All the people whom he passed in the course of his wanderings greeted him with an unwonted gaiety; and, because there was much time upon his hands, he stopped to talk with more than one of them. The subjects discussed were of the remotest importance, and it amused him to observe that he could talk intelligently upon topics altogether uninteresting on such an occasion as this. For though his interlocutor happened to notice nothing strange in his conversation, he knew that all his thoughts were of Elsie and the answer she was presently to give him.

The morning seemed long, and yet, when mid-day had arrived, it seemed to have come quickly. Holden returned to the house for dinner and took his seat at the table. Elsie was not in the room when he entered, but she came presently and sat opposite him. And now again he found to his amazement that it was

possible for a man to talk fluently of the most trivial matters even while the one matter that was of any real importance to him hung in the balance.

Elsie was very quiet, and once or twice he found her regarding him with an air of surprise. And Mrs. Chegwidden had apparently seen something during the morning to excite her curiosity. She appeared to notice the girl's preoccupation, and more than once endeavoured to draw her into the conversation. Nor did the failure of these efforts seem to discompose her in the least. On the contrary, her expression grew more and more complacent as the meal proceeded. She was a little troubled at the behaviour of her brother, whose appetite had been both small and capricious for many days past. "My dear man," she said, "'tis no wonder you're lookin' so white and whisht, and like a man always in pain but afraid to speak of it. You don't eat enough to feed a tidy-sized cat, and a man must eat to live."

She had exactly hit off Cunnack's expression: his face was pale and drawn, as if with a continual pain. He tried to laugh off her remonstrances, but something in his voice made the attempt ineffectual. "My dear Jane," he said, "a man must eat, but 'tis foolishness to eat more than you do want. I aren't so hungry as I belong to be."

Thus the meal passed off. When they rose to leave the table Holden caught Elsie's eye, and looked at her questioningly for a moment. But her eyes fell, and, though a flush came to her cheeks and the first twitch of a smile to her lips, she had not answered him.

He went into his room and lit a pipe, standing at the window to smoke it. Presently Cunnack came out of the house and walked towards the flower-houses where his tomatoes and potatoes required continual attention. Holden could not but observe, as he followed the receding figure with his eyes, how bent and aged it was, and what a new feebleness had come of late into Cunnack's walk. He finished out his pipe, and then set to work upon the novel Elsie had commanded him to finish. He did not find it easy to work, for he was continually wondering how long it would be before she was ready with her answer, and what that answer would be. He left his work from time to time and paced up and down the room. From hour to hour the tall-clock struck in the kitchen; and always he could hear its tick, tick, for Mrs Chegwidden had gone into the village to make certain necessary purchases, and Elsie was not in the house.

The afternoon passed very slowly, and yet he had made practically no progress with his work. It occurred to him that he might go down and

see what Cunnack was doing among the tomatoes, but immediately afterwards he realised that there was just now no one in the world whose companionship would seem desirable to him.

Towards four o'clock he heard Mrs Chegwidden enter the house, and after her entry followed the preparations for tea. When she had laid out the cups and plates and hung the kettle over the fire on the big hearth she tapped at Holden's door and entered. It happened that he was writing.

"Ah," she said, "I always thought you wouldn' be able to live in St Mary's long without work."

"It fills up the time," said Holden.

"Yes," she answered. "'Tis the curse of Adam, I suppose, but what we should do without it I can't fancy. And I shouldn' fancy a garden, for myself, if the plants wadn' of my own tealin' and tendin'. But did 'ee notice Cunnack, Mr Holden? Do 'ee think he ought to see a doctor? His heart was always a bit weak, and now 'tis bad, sure 'nough, if I aren't deceived."

"He doesn't look well," said Holden. "Perhaps it will pass. But a doctor could do him only good."

"My own thoughts!" exclaimed Mrs Chegwidden. "I'll tell Cunnack of it as soon as

he do come in; and 'tis little enough peace he'll have afterwards until he's seen a doctor."

She returned to the kitchen, and Holden to his writing. And presently he heard Elsie enter the house. For some little time she was forced to answer certain questions from Mrs Chegwidden. Holden listened to the conversation through the half-open door, and wondered whether the girl was as impatient as himself for the coming interview. He had pushed his papers aside and was standing at the window, a cigarette between his lips. Presently he heard Mrs Chegwidden speak. "Elsie," she said, "will 'ee run down and tell uncle that the tea is ready?"

A moment later Elsie flashed across the garden and disappeared beyond the escalonia hedge. She was still wearing her pretty frock of softened scarlet, and his eyes followed her with a kind of wonder, inasmuch as she, whom he had been wont to count a child, knew the secret on which so much of his future depended. He followed her in imagination to the tomato-house; saw her enter and deliver her message to Cunnack as he bent over the plants. And he imagined her walking back alone, the old man coming more slowly after her. A bold resolve came to him. Upon her reappearance he would call her to the window as he had done in

the morning and demand her answer. It would not take long to give, and he could wait no longer.

Suddenly Elsie reappeared. His heart leapt within him at the thought of what must immediately happen. Then he saw in a moment that something terrible had happened.

Elsie's face was white, and on it was a look of fear and horror. She advanced unsteadily, at a pace between walking and running; he knew that she would have cried out had the power remained with her.

He dashed into the kitchen, startling Mrs Chegwidden by his sudden apparition. The door was open, and Elsie met him at the threshold. Again he saw the fear in her eyes as they met his.

"What is it?" he cried. "What is the matter, Elsie?"

Her lips opened; for a moment she struggled to speak. Then: "He's dead," she sobbed. "He's lying dead down there!"

Holden moved forward just in time to catch her as she fell. At the same moment Mrs Chegwidden came upon the scene. "What is it?" she cried. "Is anything wrong with John?"

Holden gave Elsie into her arms. "Take care of her," he said. Then he hastened to the house where Cunnack had been working. The

old man lay dead upon the floor of the house, his fingers still closed upon a length of the fibre with which he had been fastening the plants to their supports.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE had been something in Elsie's eyes as he met her at the door that conveyed to him without words the knowledge of what her answer was to have been. He had recognised this fact when for one brief moment she lay unconscious in his arms, and had confessed his recognition of it by a subtle difference in his voice when he confided her to the care of Mrs Chegwidden.

Later on he spoke more plainly. "I cannot tell him," he said. "I must tell you. This morning I asked Elsie to be my wife, and she promised to give me an answer before the day was out. Naturally, she has said nothing, but I think I know what her answer would have been."

Like many women of her class, Mrs Chegwidden was before all things a fatalist. A very genuine affection for her brother had been deepened by many obligations incurred through-

out a lifetime, but, after the first shock of hearing he was dead, she had accepted the unchangeable fact with a singular calmness. She had never worked more efficiently than as she went about the melancholy tasks which had been imposed upon her that evening. She heard what Holden had to say without even the affectation of surprise which she would have deemed it proper to display had the news come to her at a more ordinary time, and under circumstances less serious.

"He knew, poor dear," she answered. "I never thought of it myself, and when he made mention of it I couldn' think 'twas true. But he was sure of it, and I saw afterwards that it was coming. He was glad of it."

"I never guessed . . . ." said Holden. "I didn't know myself . . . ."

"'Twas a thing plain enough to see," continued Mrs Chegwidden. "He saw it first, and he was glad of it. So am I. But be good to her. She's a dear little maid, with all her faults, and a little thing'll hurt her sometimes more than you would think possible."

"I shall be good to her," said Holden, and within himself the words were registered like a vow.

There was no immediate return to the subject of Elsie's answer to him, but it grew perfectly plain what that answer was to be when he

should ask for it. He was even a little angry when he observed by the demeanour of certain people with whom he was brought into contact at this time that they understood he was to become Elsie's husband. There were many at the funeral, but he and Elsie and Mrs Chegwidden were the only mourners properly so-called; he discovered then that all the little world of St Mary's took the fact of his engagement for granted.

They returned to the house, many of the dead man's friends coming with them. Mrs Chegwidden saw to their necessities with the aid of Elsie and certain special friends chosen from among her neighbours. Holden kept to his own room, and so far escaped hearing the questions and suggestions as to how matters would go in that house thereafter. But when the last of the guests had gone he came out into the kitchen. Mrs Chegwidden stood at the table; Elsie sat in a corner of the room and watched her rather wearily.

"Elsie," said Holden, "I want to tell you something. Will you come up the road with me for half an hour? You don't mind, Mrs Chegwidden?"

"Bless 'ee," said Mrs Chegwidden, with a subdued cheerfulness very unlike the jocularity that might have been expected from her under the circumstances. "Why should

I mind? I'm too old to fear being left alone."

She ceased with a sudden sigh. Without a word Elsie fetched her jacket and hat. "Are you ready?" said Holden. He opened the door and they stepped together into the garden, and so gained the road. It was a beautiful starlit night, though the deep blue of the sky was softened by the moist air; the air of Scilly, which is ever the pure breath of the sea. Holden looked down in silence at the little face that glimmered white in the beautiful obscurity. His vow came back to him with sudden force, and once again he pledged himself silently.

When he could keep silence no longer: "I don't want to bother you," he said, "but I am longing to have my answer. Is it 'yes' or 'no'?"

"Do I need to say?" said Elsie softly.

"I thought——" said Holden.

"You might have known," said Elsie; "'tis 'yes.' I knew for certain when you met me in the door."

Holden put an arm about her, drawing her close and kissing her.

"I saw your eyes," he said, "and I held you in my arms. After that I was not much afraid."

Elsie shuddered. "Poor Uncle John!" she

said, and then grew silent, as if in the remembrance of what she had found when she went to call her uncle from his work.

Holden drew her closer. "Poor little child!" he said tenderly. "It was a thing more terrible than you were meant to endure."

They outstayed by a long time the half-hour for which he had asked in the beginning. The days which had gone by since the death of the flower-grower had been very full of trouble and anxiety for both of them; and it was good beyond description to escape for a while from that bondage, and enjoy the quiet beauty of the night. The air was bland and cool; there was restoration in every breath they drew. They did not speak very often. When they had returned to the house they kissed at the door, for all the world like two rustic lovers. And Holden explained to Mrs Chegwidden how matters had arranged themselves.

"I knew it would come," she said. "And so did John, poor dear. He was well pleased to think of it. I wish you happiness."

Elsie slipped off to her own room, but Holden stayed behind to talk with Mrs Chegwidden. Before they parted it was arranged that he should shift his quarters on the morrow, and live at the hotel until the day of the wedding. There was every reason why this should not be long delayed, for it was needful

that there should be a man to help in the management of affairs, now that Cunnack was no longer alive. To a small extent they discussed those changes, but nothing could be settled as yet.

In the morning Holden spoke to Elsie upon the subject of their marriage. "I would like to have it within a month," he said.

Elsie hesitated. "But Uncle John?" she suggested. "It would be very soon."

"Why not?" said Holden. "Death is always blocking the way. If it is to be at all let it be quickly. There are a hundred reasons." He looked in her eyes and laughed, "I shall have less time to grow tired of being an engaged man!"

"Not a pretty joke!" said Elsie, though she returned his gaze with a look of infinite trust. "I suppose it must be as you wish."

"In a month?" repeated Holden.

"In a month, if you wish it," she said.

She had changed utterly since the day of Cunnack's death. This Holden recognised in a way; he could not fail to see that she loved him honestly as man need desire. Her words spoke sometimes, and the look in her eyes continually. Yet he had formed so definite an idea of her previously that there were still moments when he thought of her as a little cold creature, keeping somewhat aloof, and

eluding the most desperate pursuit of common men.

He had no lack of occupation. He liked the house in which they were living, and would have been not unwilling to see his name in big black letters on the boxes wherein flowers are conveyed to Covent Garden. But for the present he did not feel himself sufficiently skilled to be able to carry on the work of the farm. It was therefore arranged that the glass houses and the surrounding narcissus beds should be taken over for the time by a flower-growing friend of Cunnack's. He undertook to teach Holden so much as he knew of the traffic. As for the house, they were to go on occupying it, and Mrs Chegwidden readily consented to keep her old place in the establishment. During the days immediately following her brother's funeral she had made sundry visits to neighbouring houses, donning her new black gown and bonnet for the occasion, staying long, and returning with a great air of thoughtfulness.

One evening Holden had come over from the hotel. He was standing with Elsie in front of the great hearth where a furze fagot glowed in a heap of fire. Mrs Chegwidden stood a little way off beside the table. Elsie looked very pale and fragile in her black dress, to which Holden never could accustom himself.

They had been talking of the future, and Elsie had wondered laughingly whether she was fit to undertake the duties of the married state.

"But Mrs Chegwidden will be here," said Holden. "The change will be a very small one."

Mrs Chegwidden turned upon them immediately. "Now, how didn' 'ee tell me that before?" she exclaimed. "The trouble I've been in with thinkin' what I should do after the wedding no one can tell. For I thought sure that you would want the place to yourselves. If you really wish for me to stay——"

"You must stay," said the others in concert.

"Well," said Mrs Chegwidden, with an air of satisfaction, "to tell the truth, I don't think you could choose a wiser plan. All the servants in the world wouldn' do for 'ee what I can do. And I shouldn' like to leave the old house, or to leave Elsie, for all she's to be a married woman so soon."

And so this matter was settled.

There was another question which had occurred to Holden. It soon had to be discussed.

"I suppose you'll be going off somewhere for a wedding trip?" asked Mrs Chegwidden, a day or two after it had been decided that she was to stay.

Elsie looked at Holden, and her expression made his answer less assured than it would otherwise have been. "I don't know," he began.

"Oh," said Mrs Chegwidden, "but you must go somewhere. 'Tis the custom. When people are once married there's hindrances do crop up, and so if 'tis not done first thing they may never see big cities all their lives. Some do go so far as Penzance, and I know two that went to Plymouth. You must go somewhere."

Holden looked at Elsie questioningly. "You would like to go?" he asked. "I thought these things were done to get away from the world for a few days. We are far away enough here in all conscience."

"Everyone does go," said Elsie.

"Ah, well," said Holden. "We will do what everyone does. I suppose no one is anything but the average man in the act of marrying as in the act of dying. And I dare-say I shall like it too. Shall we go to Paris?"

Elsie hesitated. A little colour had come to her cheeks, and her eyes shone. "I'd rather say London," she answered. "I want to see Fleet Street, and Covent Garden, where you went that morning so early. I used to think I'd give my soul to see a play well done; and there are the crowds in the streets. I'd rather say London."

"Very well," said Holden; "we will go to London."

"Think o' that!" cried Mrs Chegwidden. "'Tis what she've longed for almost from the time she could speak. . . . Well, I shall have plenty o' time to put the place to rights for 'ee against you come back. You'll be grown quite strangers by that time."

Afterwards Elsie frequently returned to the subject of their honeymoon in London. Considering the life she had led, and the rarity of even newspapers dealing with the affairs of London, she had a strangely extensive knowledge of metropolitan matters. It was frequently inaccurate, and often led her to absolutely erroneous conclusions, but it was none the less remarkable. She had, for instance, not only the names of the principal players by heart; she had a very definite idea of the personality of each. But her ambitions in going where they might be seen were not altogether of the common kind. Holden could not share her enthusiasm, for the expedition was to be undertaken against his will, or, at any rate, against his inclinations. But there were moments when he nearly forgot himself in admiration of Elsie's desires. There were many separate things and individual people; but the fact most notable in all her speech was that she had already gained what most country-folk only arrive at when the city

has been to them as a purgatory for full a twelvemonth: she thought of London as a marvellous whole, and the streets were of more importance in her estimation than play-houses or picture-galleries.

She drove with a light hand, but Holden was already conscious of a change in his position. The novel begun at her command had done as novels frequently do, and temporarily ceased to be practicable at a certain point. It needed pitching into a drawer and forgetting for a little while. Elsie made inquiries one day.

"No," said Holden, carelessly. "The thing has stuck, and there's no use my forcing it. You can't shake unripe apples from the boughs: at least, it's unwise. It will come all right some day, and the dedication's yours already."

"But wouldn't it come all right if you kept trying?" persisted Elsie; and, though she let him have the last word in the matter when he explained, or asserted, that a man only does decent work when work comes fairly easy, he went back to the hotel with an uncomfortable conviction that he had altogether failed to convert her to his own views upon the subject. He even went so far as to take paper, and drive himself into a state of considerable irritation in an attempt to continue his tale. But the effort was without other result.

The wedding was of necessity to be as quiet

as it might be made; and—a crowning mercy—they must needs go very early to church if they were to catch the steamer and reach the mainland on the same day. Two girls of the island—ancient friends of Elsie's—were to be her bridesmaids. They were pretty girls, and manifestly amiable to a degree; but they were singularly unlike Elsie, and Holden had the vanity to wonder, when he made their acquaintance, what on earth his sweetheart had done for companions before he himself had come to the island. A friend of her uncle's—the man who had taken charge of the flower-farm—was to give her away.

Probably Holden would have resented under any circumstances the thousand and one discomforts that fall inevitably to the lot of the man who is about to commit the enormity of getting married, but here—where the world was so exceeding small that everything was everybody's business—he suffered more than most men. He had been vastly taken by the kindliness and sympathy of the people when he first came to live his new life in their midst. It was the same now; but he found it strangely oppressive. It seemed to suggest that a man's life was not altogether his own when once he had taken a wife.

The morning of the wedding was beautiful as a June morning could be. There was a proper

feeling of spring in the air when he arose, full early. And the wedding passed off excellently. Elsie played her part with an admirable composure. Holden was a little tried throughout, for Elsie had a multitude of friends, and these were all in attendance at the church. He was quite willing that they should remain her friends, but it seemed to him that this particular affair was one concerning him and Elsie alone, and their interest in the ceremony irritated him. It was with joy he said farewell to the bridesmaids and the honest flower-grower and made his way with his wife to the quay.

Mrs Chegwidden was delighted with the whole affair, and had before her much business in the way of entertaining guests. But when she said good-bye to Elsie she cried a little, as it were ceremonially, and in such a way as to leave the surrounding gaiety undamped. But a moment later she appeared behind them in the doorway with an old slipper in her hand. "Good luck!" she cried. "God bless 'ee, the both of 'ee." Then she turned back to the kitchen. "To think there was a buryin' from this house only a month ago. Well, 'tis the way of life; and John was glad to think of what has come to pass to-day."

Down at the quay, where the steamer lay, there were other friends, eagerly waiting to

wish Elsie good luck. Some of them had rice to throw, and the departure for the mainland was a sort of public show. At last the steamer moved away from its moorings, and began to make its way through the scattered islands which protect the harbour. Holden heaved a great sigh of relief, and turned to Elsie, who was looking back at the place which had so long been her home. "At last!" he said. "At last I have you to myself."

Elsie looked smilingly into his face—"You are glad?" she said.

And Holden laughed. "What do you think?" he said. "I should fancy my face bewrayeth me to-day."

Of the things which happened on this day little else need be chronicled. They journeyed pleasantly to the mainland, and at Penzance stayed the night at an hotel.

During the evening Holden went out to smoke a cigar on the promenade. A band was playing a foolish waltz in front of the hotel; young men and maidens walked to and fro in the pleasant evening air. But Holden had no desire to form one of a crowd. He walked away to the remotest end of the promenade, whither few people came, and leaning on the iron rail looked out across the dark waters at the hillside lights of Newlyn.

For a long time he puffed at his cigar in utter restfulness, but presently his brain began to play with words, and he to direct it, almost without consciousness of their meaning:

'Tis good to watch the yellow lights
Come out across the bay,
And well the music of your voice
Closes a perfect day.

Only . . . . the sunset seemed a rose
Full blown, whose leaves were falling,
And, while I listen to your voice,
I hear the old sea calling.

He repeated the verses over and over again, like a thing learned by rote and therefore void of significance. And suddenly the meaning of the words dawned on him.

"To think," he cried, "to think of a man's writing that on his wedding day! But one's verses come by contraries."

He turned away from the sea and went back to his hotel, but the verses haunted him. He had merely given form to what the gods had sent him, passively allowing the spirit of the night to use his brain. But when Elsie turned from reading beneath a big, common-shaded lamp to greet him, he bent and kissed her with an intolerable sense of having wronged and injured her.

CHAPTER IX.

THE honeymoon in London passed delightfully. In the beginning, it may be, Holden played the part of *cicerone* somewhat perfunctorily; but Elsie's enthusiasm was contagious, and eventually affected him also. In a little while it might have appeared that he was the person enamoured of London, and his one desire to make her share his passion. He conducted her through the city as if he had made it himself.

Some of their amusements were ordinary enough. They went to theatres all the world was visiting, and to the music-halls where the best-known singers were to be heard, as well as to certain queer little places on the south side of the river where a stall cost only a shilling and the chairman flourished as in the olden days.

Nor were Elsie's desires other, now she was actually in London, than they had been

when she only hoped for the sight of it : the life, and not merely the amusements of the people, interested her. They made curious, purposeless journeys in hansoms and outside omnibuses. Holden had the most liberal views in the world as to the things his wife might be permitted to see, and during the weeks of the honeymoon Elsie found herself in many strange places : places where women apparently of the utmost respectability seemed to scent her coming while they were still elbowing their way along the packed pavement many yards away, and regarded her with almost angry stares, as if to ask why she intruded here.

" I believe," she said to Holden one night, when they had got back to regions more familiar and were supping at a restaurant, " I believe they could tell you what is woman's sphere ! "

One day all London was illuminated in honour of the visit of some foreign potentate whose coming was of vast international significance. Of course they had seats to view the pageant, and in a way Elsie was interested. But it was the people she watched, and Holden guessed that she would rather have been among them than here, out of the noise and stir. That night when they had dined he suggested that they should go to a theatre hard by.

"Would you rather do anything else?" he added in a moment, seeing that the suggestion did not seem to make her enthusiastic.

"I'd rather see the streets," she said; "they are so full. One can always see plays."

Holden laughed. "In Scilly?" he said. "You have seen four lately, but how many before?"

"At least," said Elsie, looking up as she put on her gloves, "the streets will be better to-night."

There was nothing more to be said. They went out, and Holden found himself gradually compelled to go into those places where the crowd was greatest. Elsie had never looked prettier, for the excitement had brought a colour to her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled: never had he felt more strongly that she was a child whom it was not immoral to spoil.

And when she had been satisfied he took a cab to Piccadilly Circus. There they mounted to the outside of a 'bus, taking tickets for Hyde Park Corner. For he had showed her many of the things which had interested him before he went to Scilly; and this ride was one he had often taken in the old days because the scattered lights seen in the vague darkness as he looked south over the Park railings never failed to remind him of the lights of the drift-boats out after pilchards on the water of a

bay where he had once got back to health out of sickness, and on whose shores the autumn nights were beautiful beyond expression.

"Do you see it?" he said presently.

Elsie had not been looking as he had done. Now she raised her head.

"I can fancy what your harbour was like," she said. "But you must have been sick for a sight of the sea when you found out the likeness. To me it's just another bit of London."

"London holds everything," he admitted unwillingly. "But that is the best, unless it be the Docks. And they made me so sick of everything that I rarely went there. The ships and the things they bring—ivory, spices. . . . But you would not care for them."

On one point only was there any sign of difference between them. Elsie was full of interest as to the regions in which men live when they are married, and enraptured with the monotonous villa residences with which they abound. Holden loathed them, and was troubled that she did not. But there were years and years before them, and Elsie, who was very conscious of the fact, did not press matters greatly.

The drive to Paddington on the morning of their return brought back vividly to Holden the day when he had put London behind him. He had been glad to go then; and now was

thrice as glad. Only . . . he looked at Elsie. It was an exquisite clear morning, neither hot nor cold; the sun shone pleasantly, though little white clouds dappled the pale sky. London looked beautiful, for summer had come to it, yet had not soiled so much as the hem of her garment. Holden saw that Elsie's eyes dwelt upon everything with a look of regret. She was still enamoured of the things for whose sacrifice she had now become his most sufficient justification. He watched her until they had reached the station, and she did not notice, for she was not thinking of him; nor did he desire to make her realise her regrets by venturing any remark upon them.

He bought her a heap of newspapers, and they had corner seats opposite one another in an otherwise empty compartment.

As they passed through the desolate-looking country which lies immediately beyond London neither spoke. But presently Elsie sighed audibly.

"Glad to be going back?" asked Holden.

"No," said Elsie. "At least . . . Yes, I suppose I am glad."

Later in the day she shook off something of her depression, which, indeed, Holden was no longer in a position to notice very particularly. For the lovely azure of the sea by Teignmouth and Dawlish filled him as he looked with infinite

content; and, later, the deep Cornish valleys, with roadways stretching untrodden among the trees, seemed veritable haunts of peace. He was getting back to the good country where his vague fears and disquietude would die away as surely as flame dies when the air is shut from it.

Twilight was falling when they reached Penzance; they spent the evening at a window overlooking the Bay, and on the morrow took the boat to Scilly, enjoying a home-coming smooth as every home-coming should be.

Long before they had gained the little grey quay, Elsie had espied and pointed out to her husband the substantial black-robed figure of Mrs Chegwidden, and near her—manifestly under strict surveillance—a boy who should convey their luggage to the house on his donkey-cart. Elsie waved her handkerchief as they approached and the effect was electric. Mrs Chegwidden answered the signal immediately, and, turning to the boy, renewed her instructions with great and evident energy.

"My dear," she said, when Elsie had landed. "I'm fine and glad to have 'ee back again. And you're looking well, too. Why——"

She broke off to examine a new hat that Elsie was wearing, and presently gave vent at once to her admiration and her curiosity.

Elsie had little opportunity to answer, and soon they were joined by Holden, who had been seeing to the luggage.

"Well," said Mrs Chegwidden genially. "You're glad to be back, I'll be bound!"

"Indeed we are," said Holden. "It is worth while to go away to get such a moment as this."

They walked slowly back to the house, conversing on a multitude of subjects. When they had arrived there Elsie and Mrs Chegwidden mounted the stairs and were for a space invisible, though Holden heard their voices continually as he overhauled his books and papers in the little room which looked upon the garden. Presently Mrs Chegwidden reappeared. She had lived contentedly in Scilly all the days of her life; and of an assemblage of two hundred, she would have spoken as "crowds o' people." Yet she was none the less a keen lover of the excitements of life, and revelled in the repetition of the experiences of these twain in London. But it was days before she had acquired more than the vaguest information as to their doings, for her questions came so quickly one after the other that there was scant room for any answer.

She had been talking with Holden for some time when Elsie reappeared. Holden

looked up in the middle of a sentence, and straightway broke off with an exclamation of pleasure and surprise. During her absence she had donned once more the old scarlet dress in which he had first seen her, and she carried the brown palm, and with a cap in her hand. Holden looked at her with delight: it was like seeing her again for the first time, and yet knowing what was to come after.

"This is like coming home again," he said.

Elsie, laughing, looked down at the frock with mock contempt.

"It is very old," she said. "This is the last time of wearing."

The evening passed delightfully, and on the days that came after Holden found no need of any other occupation than to wander idly over the island, renewing his acquaintance with the friendly people and the places yet more friendly. And Elsie did not carry her threat into immediate execution: she still wore the scarlet frock, and seemed little changed from the days of Holden's first coming. He had never known such happiness as was his during those first days of their return to Scilly.

Mrs Chegwidden still continued to find their conversation enchanting. Something of the first vehemence of her curiosity was abated, and she would sit still and let them

talk, watching them the while with an air of the most intense satisfaction.

"I believe," said Elsie one evening, when at last they were left together, "I believe she fancies it was she who made us man and wife!"

One day the girl made a little confession. Holden chanced to refer to a passage in one of his books; he was going to quote it when Elsie stopped him with the exclamation, "I remember it."

"You've read it?" he said.

"Of course," she answered; "I've read them all."

"But——" said Holden.

"Oh," said Elsie, "I borrowed one from your shelves and read it one night when you were out on a long-liner. I bought the others. That was why I advised you to go on with the one you had spoken of."

"Advised?" echoed Holden, "it struck me at the time that you commanded."

He spoke lightly, and Elsie's only answer was a laugh that amounted to an admission. But somehow he felt that she had renewed her injunction, and on the morrow he took the written chapters from the drawer where they had been lying and read them through. Then he began to write, and found that the thing had developed a good deal during the period

in which he had ceased to trouble himself about it. He worked more rapidly than usual, and there was a goodly pile of manuscript upon the table at the end of a few hours.

Then Elsie entered.

"Admire my diligence!" said Holden.

"You are going on with the novel?" she said. "I am very glad. I have been wondering when you would set to work again. It must be fully six weeks since you touched it."

She ceased and left him alone, as though she deemed his work of more importance than his pleasure. But somehow the spell was broken. He found himself arrested in the middle of a sentence, and could by no means arrive at the end. The result of all his efforts to do so was merely a considerable aggravation of his discomfort.

CHAPTER X.

THE summer passed placidly towards that season of blue and gold, that reconciles men with its promise of spring to the season of autumn. The book which Holden had finished before he put London behind him had appeared, and made a success more real than any of its predecessors had achieved. Even they had begun to creep into new editions, and more publishers than one were anxious to have his name in their lists. The editor of a very popular magazine wrote to ask if he would be willing to do him a serial, and offered a price at which Elsie opened her eyes, and Mrs Chegwidden treated Holden with a respect that came near to being awe.

"'Tis a strange thing," she said one day, *à propos* of nothing at all, "'tis a strange thing the money that's in a man's brain. You eat and you

drink, and you walk about, same as any other man, and for a few hours now and again you do shut yourself up and write; and lo and behold, 'tis like a manufactory o' bank-notes. Well, 'tis a mercy there's some can't do it, or there'd be none left to bake bread and wash dirty clothes; you're a man picked out, in a manner of speaking."

Naturally, Holden was gratified by his success. He had written only to please himself in the first place, certain friends in the second, and after them, the great unknown public; and he was glad to have pleased the unknown multitude, for their satisfaction justified the pleasure he and the friends he valued had taken in the best of his work.

He made good progress with the tale he had begun at Elsie's command, and there were moments when he was fain to admit that the thing pleased him exceedingly. But, though his success was to this extent a stimulus, he was in no danger of the sin of over-production. He had chosen his own mode of life, and chosen it in such a manner, that for the future he need only write the things it would cause him actual discomfort not to write.

It was a continually growing trouble to him that Elsie could not look at matters from the same point of view. She was the least mercenary creature in the world, yet she occasionally

appeared to think that man was primarily created in order that he might make the utmost possible amount of money. He was more than a little vexed that she should so misrepresent herself.

There came, towards the end of July, a week of constant rain. To live in Scilly was to be inured to rain, and even to love it, because of the beauty of the world when the clouds had blown over for a space and the sunlight gleamed on the wet roads and jewelled foliage. But for a week there was no such interlude. The rain fell steadily until the earth was sodden and miserable; everything was dank and hateful to the touch; and even though they dropped no moisture for a while, the grey clouds never for a moment ceased to hide the blue of the sky.

Then at last the wind went round to the north-west, at the close of a most wretched day. All night it blustered about the house, and in the morning men woke early to see the green earth glistening with sunlight, while the last of the clouds drove southwards under a dazzling sky. Holden had done his utmost to be diligent hitherto, but to-day the thought of work was intolerable. He ate his breakfast with the appetite of an athlete, and when it was finished, took his stick from its corner and lit a pipe. As he stood in the doorway looking his

delight upon the world, Elsie came to his side.

"You are going out?" she said. "I am glad, for you have been working very hard of late. How much is left to be done, by the bye?"

"Of the novel?" asked Holden. "A week may well see the end of it; though one never knows what will happen. I shall finish it very soon."

"And what of the serial?" said Elsie. "Have you thought that out?"

"The serial?" queried Holden. "Oh! the thing for Simpson. I'd forgotten; yes, I'm going to do a thing some day that would doubtless please him, but I may not do it immediately. There are others which interest me more."

"But the money," said Elsie. "Surely his price is a good one?"

Holden looked at her curiously. "Is there anything you want?" he asked. "To be frank, we are growing rich at such an unholy rate merely by not spending, that there's little need of making money, and I thought you should see Paris as soon as the summer had quite gone from Scilly, or whenever a change seemed likely to be pleasant. One can't spend money here in Scilly; why should one be at the pains of earning it?"

Elsie's voice was a little touched with irritation. "One need not always go on living in Scilly," she said. "I suppose there is no one who would if it was possible to exist decently somewhere else. But we shall never be agreed. Go for your tramp and come back full of ideas." Her voice grew bright and affectionate again. As Holden turned at the gate to look back he saw her smiling her farewell; but the farewell which he took with him was her phrase—"We shall never be agreed." He realised the truth of what she had said; and his enjoyment of the exquisite morning was marred by his wonder as to whether she understood how great a matter it was concerning which they were disagreed: as to whether he himself could yet perceive its ultimate magnitude.

Upon his return, it fell to the lot of Mrs Chegwidden to increase his trouble and perplexity. Elsie was not in the house, and Mrs Chegwidden was free for the conversation in which her heart delighted, having completed her preparations for dinner.

"Well," she said, "I wonder how much longer I shall have the chance to fit dinners for you?"

"Do you want me to turn prophet?" said Holden. "I've no idea how long you are likely to live, though I hope it may be as long as you find life to your taste. Or can it be

that you have a husband in view, and are breaking the news gently?"

Mrs Chegwidden laughed, after a curious silent fashion of her own. "Me marry?" she cried. "I had one trial of it, and none can say but I did well. But I wouldn' marry again, I reckon. As the saying is, I'd rather be like Knuckey: as I am. No, I didn't mean that."

"You're not going to die?" said Holden jestingly.

"Not yet, I hope," she answered.

"Well, then," said Holden, "what is there to prevent your getting me dinners until the end of time?"

"I should never leave Scilly," was the answer. "I was born in Scilly, bred in Scilly, married in Scilly. I've a husband and a little baby buried in the churchyard, and I could never live away from here. But with you two 'tis otherwise. You are young and neither of 'ee has much to make Scilly dearer than another place. Elsie was never fond of the island from the time she first grew to understand that there was land where the steamers came from. You will not stay long. In a little while you'll be living in London, where there are others like yourself. I only hope there'll be letters now and again, and that you won't forget there's people fond of both of you over here in Scilly."

The last part of her speech interfered with the remonstrance Holden had upon his lips at the beginning. He understood that Mrs Chegwidden knew more of Elsie's mind than had been revealed to himself.

"Indeed," he said, "I don't think we are likely to go while matters continue as they are at present. But in any case we shall not forget Scilly. Even Elsie, whatever she may sometimes fancy nowadays, would find herself pining for the flowers and the sea air, and the friendliness of everything, before she had been long in London."

"I can fancy that," said Mrs Chegwidden; "but you must remember that she was born in London of a mother that was never out of London all her wicked days. 'Tis natural, in a way, that she should think kindly of it."

Holden sighed. "Yes," he said, "I suppose it is very natural. She is not fond of Scilly."

A moment later Elsie entered, her pale cheeks prettily coloured with the exercise of walking in the blithe wind. The colour remained and her eyes shone brilliantly while they sat at dinner. Holden forgot for the moment all that had gone before, and watched her with delight. Later he went into the study and set himself to write. He found the work easy, and therefore quickly secured

for himself the additional stimulus of knowing that what he did was probably good.

The wind kept high until the evening: the air was still damp, and it was a little chilly. A fire was kindled in the study when the blind had at last been drawn. Holden sat reading in an easy-chair, Elsie occupying herself with some fancy-work hard by. Mrs Chegwidden still kept her chosen place in the kitchen, and it was necessary at intervals to reply to the observations it occurred to her to make. But otherwise they talked but little until it grew late and the fire began to die down.

Then Elsie rose and put her work away. She moved about the room humming a song, and presently, leaning over the back of her husband's chair, she deprived him of his book. "Don't read any longer," she said coaxingly.

Holden looked up at her with a lazy smile. "You want to talk," he asked.

"Put me a stool," said Elsie, and when he had obeyed, she took her seat at his feet and leaning forward, looked into the fire.

Holden leaned back in his chair and watched the gleam of the firelight in her hair through half-closed eyes.

"Guy," said Elsie presently.

"Yes," he answered.

"Have I been detestably ill-tempered these

last few days that the rain has fallen so constantly?"

Holden's eyes opened wide with astonishment. "Not in the least," he said; "what on earth made you ask?"

"The sunshine of to-day, I think," answered Elsie. "It made me realise how miserable I had been all the week before."

"You should have told me," said Holden. "I should have been wretched myself if I had not been hard at work. But you did not let me guess that you were unhappy. You certainly were not bad-tempered — I don't think you could be, Elsie."

For a little while she looked into the fire without making any answer; then she leant back and rested her head against his knee. His hand stole down and played with the silken hair, and presently she began to speak.

"I have been," she said resolutely. "You somehow manage to be content with this life. Perhaps that is because you took it of your own free will. But I hate it. One can't be unhappy without some outside cause when the sun is shining and the wind is pleasant; to-day has been well enough, but that is the exception. Ever since I can remember, I have hated the thought of living here."

Holden looked down at her and spoke with painful anxiety.

"Why is it?" he said. "What is wrong with the life you have led?"

"Oh!" cried Elsie impatiently, "you don't understand. And yet you have known London. It is all wrong. Is it worth while to live if one is not sometimes made to laugh or cry, to wonder or be afraid, by the things which are passing in the world. Here we do not live: we do but grow older day by day and year by year. Even the plants have something of what we lack; the come-and-go of the seasons, and the changes from storm to sunshine, and from cold to warm must make them feel. But we have nothing."

"Surely," said Holden, "we also have the changes of the seasons to watch. And in growing older day by day we learn more and more of one another. Adam was not better pleased in Paradise than I am here; and he had hardly more to learn."

"A Paradise!" echoed Elsie with renewed impatience. "A paradise of plants if you will; but we are not plants, unhappily. We are creatures who might live, and here we are merely adding day to day, until the day shall come when from mere incapacity we shall be content not to live. We might as well die immediately as wait until the time when death will find us without any desire of release."

She paused, and for a space Holden

was helplessly silent. His hand still played tenderly with her hair, and while he was seeking the words he needed she guessed his thought.

"Don't think," she said, "don't think that I count myself unkindly treated. It is all the other way: since you came I've known myself to be more fortunate than I had ever dared to hope. But this is a kind of wealth which is lost if we do not spend it from day to day. It is because we are wasting so much happiness that I hate this little island and the sea that shuts us round."

"Shall I go through it all again," said Holden. "I have cause to love Scilly, because I found you here. I have found the happiness I sought in coming, and I swear to you, it is here we have most likely to live. What do the others matter to us? The world would be no better and no worse for us if we only lived upon it. Can you conceive of Adam and Eve voluntarily taking up the curse of earning every morsel of food and every hour of leisure by the sweat of their brows and deliberately shutting behind them the gates of the Garden of Eden? I think we might be sufficient to one another's needs."

"We are," said Elsie, rising and looking down at him. "I have more than all I need."

"And yet——" said Holden hesitatingly.

"And yet," she said, "I hate this little island, whose people see and enjoy not half so much of the life of the world as the flowers they grow in their fields. I hate to hear the sea always, and to know it shuts me off from the places where people really live. I'd give all the stars in Heaven for a long gas-lit street, and the noise of a crowd far off."

"If you did but know!" said Holden. "If you did but know. One can understand why there are always stars that fall."

"Well . . . ." said Elsie, with a curious note of defiance in her voice. But, seeing his face, she changed in a moment. "Come and look at the stars," she said. "Sometimes they vex me; but to-night it should be otherwise."

They went and stood in the doorway, looking out upon the little garden with its black hedge of escalonia. The wind had fallen, and the sky was filled with stars, and with the dim splendour of the Milky Way. They stood a long time without speaking, and then Elsie sighed. "After all," she said, "they are better than the sunlight." And very soon she was sleeping lightly as a child. But Holden lay thinking far into the night, and the dawn had began to appear when he too gained the refuge of sleep.

CHAPTER XI.

A HUNDRED unrememberable trifles influenced Holden in the month which followed. "He takes nothing seriously, except the weather," someone had once said of him, and the statement was not without its truth. At least, it is probable that merely atmospheric conditions had been the causes alike of his most exalted moments and of those in which he sounded the lowest depths of depression. The weather just now was execrable.

Autumn had come, but without its proper setting of dazzling skies, strong winds, and wild, torn clouds that cannot linger, though they dash the yellowing leaves with heavy showers as they pass. The clouds came and covered all the sky, and it was always raining. Holden continued to work at the novel; and when he had reached the end he kept the manuscript by him, correcting and revising with metriculous care. It was at least an

affair of the immediate present, and while it occupied him, he was not compelled to take any particular thought for the future.

Yet the present was not altogether good to contemplate. After the outbreak that has been recorded, Elsie said nothing of her discontent. Indeed her eagerness to have it forgotten sometimes defeated itself by becoming obvious, and suggesting that she was concealing far more than she could ever have spoken. And the grey desolation of the weather preyed upon her not a little, so that with all her efforts she could not make shift to appear content with her environment. Holden grew daily more and more certain that his experiment had failed: that in time her self-restraint would break down, and misery result if he did not abandon his desires.

Sometimes she donned the scarlet frock, with an effort to please which was infinitely depressing. He had thought of her as a child —he did so now upon occasions—and had taken her most intimate confidences very far from seriously. He realised now that she had put no greater importance upon his own utterances on the occasion of certain outbreaks of enthusiastic propagandism, which now recurred to him. She must have been serenely amused: since it was manifestly the merest axiom with her that a man, when he had

really come to himself, would bow his neck beneath the yoke and proceed to work, not merely to the extent necessary to secure decent comfort, but to the full limit of his earning capacity. He did not doubt that she loved him, but he wondered how far she had been brought to do so by the thought that here at last was a man who should deliver her from the life she hated.

All these things were brought more closely home to him when, the book being finished and despatched, he allowed himself a few days of more or less miserable indolence. One effect of the experiences of these weeks had been a resolve to do the serial for which he had been asked. He said nothing to Elsie, for he was still loth beyond all words to begin the task, since to begin it would mean admitting that he had abandoned all his favourite theories, and of his own free will became a slave again.

One day, the most wretched of all, ended without rain. The sky was dull and dark; black clouds made inky blotches on it, and the stars were nowhere visible. The noise of the sea sounded everywhere, like the sigh of a helpless god over the blind sorrows of men. Holden had learned in his days of idleness what were the sufferings of his wife, and he was filled with the desire to make her more reconciled to existence.

They were sitting by the fireside reading, and Elsie laid down her book with a sigh of utter weariness. There was a pause, and then Holden spoke.

"Will you come out for an hour?" he said. "The rain is over now."

Elsie looked across at him doubtfully. "I don't know," she said. "I am sick and tired of it. It will be dark and miserable. The rain has fallen so constantly."

Holden rose energetically. "Come along," he said. "At least it is not falling now."

A few minutes later they left the house, and walked slowly through the gloom of the night, choosing the most solitary places, though there were few afoot that night. Very soon they reached an elevation, to which the noise of the sea came more clearly on the light wind which was blowing across the island.

"Oh," said Elsie. "The sea! Always the sea!"

Holden did not answer at once, knowing well there was nothing he could say. But gradually the spell of the night began to work upon them both, and he knew that she had forgotten something at least of her discontent. "After all," he said, "life is none so bad."

"It is well enough, I suppose," she answered. "Only . . ."

"We have found one another," he con-

tinued. "There is nothing else that matters much."

Elsie sighed as if impatient with herself. "Nothing," she said. "There is nothing that should matter, if only God had made us reasonable beings. What should rain matter, or—or Scilly? But He made us men and women, the most foolish of all His creatures, so that big things and small are of the same importance to us, and, being wealthy as wealth goes, we must needs envy the very beggars for want of some small thing that those who have it would hardly name among their possessions. These last weeks I have been near thinking there was nothing good or desirable in all the universe. And all because it rained, and because the people who are nothing at all to us were few in number and were content to do nothing all their days."

"If you had but work!" said Holden. "I have hardly had the time to think of other things until these days since the novel was finished with. I am going to do something for you."

"Yes?" said Elsie.

"I am going to do that serial. It will not be good, but it will do well enough. And there is something to be said for bad work if it succeeds in capturing the public's money, even though one has no need of money."

"It will be good enough," said Elsie.

"Why should it be bad merely because you know that it is wanted? I am glad you are going to do it. A man must take his chances when he gets them, and you can't know that this life will always content you."

After this she recovered something of her wonted vivacity, and when they were returned to the house all tokens of her late depression had disappeared. She talked gaily, and asked a multitude of questions as to the serial, volunteering a hundred suggestions in reply to the answers she got. The morning which ensued was less grey than some which had preceded it. Her pleasant excitement continued, and when at last she left Holden to his work, he took his pen, and wrote the title of the tale—chosen by her with unerring instinct out of several which had occurred to him—with none of the reluctance which he had experienced in looking forward to the work.

He made some little progress then and afterwards, but for every page that stood, there were half-a-dozen torn up in despair. Yet there was no reason why it should be so. The story was clear beyond the ordinary to him, nor could he think of any knowledge or experience whose acquirement would make its production easier. Yet his progress was slow and painful to an intolerable extent. It seemed to him as he went on that he had lost

the power to write the commonest sentence in decent English: to express the simplest conception straight and clearly. And so he gradually found himself immured in the purgatory of the artist, the state in which it is not possible to a man to escape the fear that his power of invention may presently fail him, or, perhaps, has already done so. He knew well enough that he did no more than share the common lot of his kind, and that previous attacks of the same malady had gone as unaccountably as they came, and left him more than ever enraptured with his art, and blest with freedom in its exercise. But, by some strange perversity of temperament, he found this knowledge a positive aggravation of his distress.

"How does the story go?" said Elsie one evening, when the house was quiet, and the time of sleep near.

"Oh," said Holden impatiently, "it is lucky we are here in Scilly, where there is no absolute need of more than we possess already. In the last three days I've done some ten slips of the thing—and I would destroy them if I had the heart to acknowledge honestly that in that period I have done nothing."

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said. "The affair is of the simplest: I cannot write a line."

"It will not last," she replied. "Why should you worry? You will be working as well as ever in a day or two. You know it."

"Oh!" he said, "I know it well enough. But in the meanwhile——"

"Don't think about it," said Elsie.

"That is very easy saying," answered Holden, a trace of irritation in his voice. "Unfortunately——"

"The truth is," said Elsie, "Scilly is not, after all, the ideal place for such as you. With the best will in the world you can't get a plant to grow in soil that does not contain its necessary food, and there are things necessary to you that you can't get here, or you would not look so injured when I say 'don't think of it!'"

Holden laughed incredulously. "I never knew what contentment meant until I came here. Even before I had you it seemed I lacked nothing. What is it you prescribe?"

"Excitement, change," said Elsie. "You are doing a thing more or less unnatural in writing your tales. For a space you may provide your own motive power, but not for ever, or for long. Here you have your work for occupation, and when it is finished you can think of what you will do to-morrow. What else is there? Can you ever forget yourself here in Scilly? You need to go

sometimes where there is so much life that the individual share seems fuller and more vivid than here. You need to get lost in a crowd sometimes—as one is constantly in London—and to lose your individuality as completely as raindrops do when they have reached the sea."

"Oh, London!" cried Holden. "I am pining for London?"

"You would give the world to be content with Scilly," answered Elsie; "but what you ask is impossible. You cannot live with a pulse that never changes its beat; you have nerves, and you are bound to go sooner or later where they will get the exercise they crave. It is not an affair that you can arrange."

Holden listened with something like anger at his heart. He could not blind himself to the truth which lay in her words, but the truth was bitter hearing. If she were right, his coming hither had been a most ridiculous rebellion against the laws of his birth. Doubtless the gods had laughed at him, but it was a thing almost intolerable that the revelation of the situation in which he stood should come from Elsie.

"Nerves!" he cried. "Lord knows, my nerves have not lacked exercise lately. But you contradict yourself. 'You will be working

as well as ever in a day or two,' you said; and you spoke truly. I should be the same man, and my troubles the same, though I changed Scilly air for London. It's not any affair that we can alter."

"I'll admit the contradiction," said Elsie. "'Tis the fault of human nature. Nevertheless the fact remains that you were never made to be happy here, where the best a man may get is a sort of plant-like placidity. You were made to know the heights and depths; here you do not even get the depths. There is no change in what surrounds you, and there was never man who needed change—whether from good to bad, or from bad to good—so certainly as you do. God made you so."

Holden's mind bitterness increased, but his voice was quiet. "It may be so," he said. "And being made a fool, one must needs pledge himself to the pursuit of folly, and avoid all other courses, as he would shun the pit itself? It is true enough, but it is not pleasant hearing."

Elsie crossed to his side, and sat upon the arm of his chair, her head against his shoulder. "You are talking nonsense," she said. "The book has worried you more than I dreamed. The only true thing I said was that we are what we are, and must make the best of it."

"And take a flat up innumerable flights of stairs," said Holden.

"It would be good," said Elsie. "But even now we are not far from the best. I am well pleased to be what I am, since it is I that you have chosen to love. And you——?"

"Oh!" said Holden. "There are consolations. Only——" He rose and took some sheets of manuscript from a little table. He tore them into scraps and flung them on the fire. "One may as well admit the truth," he continued, as the blaze arose. "I should have done that before if I had not been very much of a coward. Yes, we are not very far from the best. And I would not change lots with the veriest Gammon in all Scillies."

Elsie was standing by the mantelpiece, on which there stood two candles with scarlet shades, and a couple of slender glasses holding a few scattered flowers. Holden watched her as she extinguished the candles, her lips pouted, her face very serious. He could not but feel that to fall short of contentment was to be singularly ungrateful to Fate.

CHAPTER XII.

THUS matters moved towards the inevitable crisis, which, had not Fate stepped in to prevent their honestly facing it, would have left them settled in a happiness impregnable, because founded on the firm ground of a perfect understanding.

Holden found himself still unable to work; unable absolutely to set forth in the baldest prose scenes which had long been clear as print and pictures in his mind. And he foolishly chose to force himself to accomplish what he still knew to be utterly impossible, until in due season the time should come when to do it would be a pleasure. For he began to recognise that his experiment had failed, and that he must presently confess it. In a twelvemonth, at the outside, they would be holding a red-brick villa at Dulwich. Elsie would be happy, and, for himself, he did not doubt that he should be as prosperous as any other tradesman.

The thought of the moment, inevitably approaching, when it would be necessary he should make this confession, haunted him, and grew always more and more intolerable. Finally it came unexpectedly, at a chance utterance of Elsie's.

When they were newly back from London, Holden had not forgotten his vague dreams of some day becoming a grower of flowers, and taking on the business of Cunnack. Old Spargo, the man who had taken over the houses and the ground, had a very genuine affection for Elsie, and Holden's fancy pleased him. He entered very energetically upon the business of teaching, taking care that his pupil should miss no operation of importance, and striving at every opportunity, when they were talking together, to enlighten him as to the mysteries of the trade.

Holden had been glad to learn. He displayed more than a little aptitude, and was never weary of listening to the facts and theories which Spargo placed at his disposal. For the work was of a sort which pleased him; and at this juncture it was the fittest imaginable occupation. It kept him interested and occupied in his hours of leisure, and yet rested him infinitely, taking his thoughts altogether away from the work from which he came to it. He had never known such absolute placid hours

as he knew now, for the work pleased him, and no man can deal rightly with things that grow out of the good earth until he has grown quiet and placid himself. He did not think seriously, or often, of the day when he might follow the pursuit more seriously; the occupation and the gradual acquirement of knowlege were of themselves sufficient. Until these last weeks no pupil could have been more diligent in taking all opportunities of learning.

But about the time when he began to bother himself with the tale he could not write, he ceased to take any interest in the things he had found so delightful, though the season of Autumn is one when there is a vast deal to learn. He was not in the mood for such an occupation, he said to himself; and so he denied himself the one thing which might have helped to cure his disorders. Old Spargo was hurt, and a little surprised—he had been proud of his pupil—and presently Elsie noticed her husband's abstention, and spoke of it.

He had been shut up with the novel, and in the course of several intolerable hours had produced a miserably small quantity of stuff, which it would have cost him as much to read over now it was written as it had done to produce it. At last he ceased from his fruitless efforts, put on his hat, and was about to go for a walk round the island. Elsie was

in the kitchen, and saw him as he passed the door.

"You are going for a walk?" she asked.

"Yes," said Holden. "I am tired of writing."

"Why don't you go down and watch Mr Spargo?" she said; "I'll warrant there is plenty to see."

"Oh," said Holden, "I think a walk will be better."

"You haven't been down with Mr Spargo much lately," said Elsie; "I thought you were rather interested."

"I was," he answered; "but where's the use of troubling any longer? I know as much of it as I shall need to know if ever I want to write about it."

"Is that so much?" asked Elsie, laughing. "I should have thought you would need to know more if ever you are to go into the business for yourself. Some of the people are growing wondrous clever nowadays."

"I thought you knew that I had given that up," he said. "Didn't you tell me it was foolishness in me to hope that I could ever go on living permanently as we have lived hitherto? I thought you were very certain upon that point."

Elsie looked at him with pained eyes. "Go for your walk," she said. "But why do you let that novel bother you so?"

"I am doing it for your sole pleasure," he answered. "Besides, it is not the novel that troubles me. It will come in time. But I wish I could work at it now when I need to be occupied. It is not good to sit and do nothing, while every separate thing one's eyes fall upon says, *Fool, fool, fool,* as clear as if the words were spoken."

"I do not understand," said Elsie.

"And yet you should," he answered. "It should be very plain. Everything tells me, I was saying, what you told me the other day, that I was a fool to form fine plans for the conduct of a life that must needs move in the groove appointed. One grows tired of hearing it."

"You are not just," said Elsie. "You make me say what I would never dream of saying, since it is not true. What I did tell you, you yourself have continually owned: that for a fancy's sake you have chosen a mode of life which does not altogether suit you. That is no great error. You can make an end of it when you will."

"Oh," he cried impatiently. "The thing is very plain to you. I found myself sick of the life I had been leading, for the sole reason that I had but little money, and a considerable need of it; a need that bound me to work at things I loathed, for the mere purpose of pay-

ing for a host of costly things I did not need. I was never reconciled, but I did not rebel, inasmuch as there remained no other course to be taken. I presumed that I should go on travelling the same round year after year, until what was comparatively easy had become grindingly difficult, and myself quite incapable of escaping, if a chance of escape should offer. And then . . . It was a fancy that brought me hither, you think? If ever a man had hopes that were dear to him, that man was I, and the hopes, those that I carried when I saw the islands growing clearer in the distance. Your consistency is admirable; you told me that first day that I should not stay long, and I laughed. To-day you tell me the same thing, and I must own that you speak truly; but you must not expect me to do it as one might own that the clouds had blown over, and that the season has not been of the best for the flowers."

"If you go," said Elsie, "you will not go alone. Is that——"

"Oh," said Holden. "If I go, I take you with me, and you will be happy for a time. You will laugh if you chance to remember how loth I was to give up my foolish fancy. But it will not last. You want to live, and will not be content to keep the house of a mere workman—and a poor one at that. I have been a fool."

Elsie flushed; his last words struck her like a blow. "And bid fair to be something more than that," she interjected.

"Indeed," he answered, "you make me so. It is bad enough to have been a fool with regard to myself: it is merely maddening to think of what I have done for you. And the thing is not the little mistake that you imagine it, to be corrected and done away with by a change of plans. Things will not go well. You will not be satisfied, after the first, and I —can you fancy what it will be like to me?"

"God knows," said Elsie, "that I am sorry enough. Why did you come, and come to this house of all others? I was not content before, but at least——"

"You may well ask," said Holden, "but there is no need of a fresh answer; it was a piece of my misfortune. I had been sent out to play the fool before the gods, and it was a part of my lot to make you my partner."

"Oh," said Elsie, "don't excuse yourself, when excuses are unnecessary. I had my share in the thing."

She broke off with an impatient gesture and moved to the back of the room. While they had been talking Holden had stood near the door. There was a brief silence, during which he strove to remember what had been the origin of their conversation. Then the gate

sounded on its hinges, a footstep on the gravel, and a moment later Mrs Chegwidden entered.

"Goin' for a walk?" she cried, seeing that he wore a hat and had his stick in his hand. "Well, 'tis the best thing you can do. The rain edn' falling, for a wonder, and there's sunshine between whiles. I was glad to be out myself. But you must be quick, for the afternoon is moving on."

"I shall not be long," said Holden. "I think I will go down to the post-office and see if there are any letters. They should be ready by now."

"Aw," said Mrs Chegwidden, "I'm growing forgetful in my old days. I've got the letters here; what a lot you do get, to be sure."

She fumbled at a very inaccessible pocket, and at last produced a bundle of letters. "Six of them there should be," she said. And in a moment she added with surprise: "Why, where's Elsie gone to?"

She looked at him questioningly.

Holden turned and saw that Elsie had disappeared. "I suppose she has gone upstairs," he said. "I didn't notice."

"Well," said Mrs Chegwidden, "I suppose she'll be down directly. I must go about my work, or I shan't be finished against the evening."

She retired to the back of the room, and

began to unpack the parcels she had been carrying, while Holden stood by the doorway and examined his letters. Some of them dealt with matters of business importance, and these he opened first. Finally he opened one that was addressed in a handwriting which, though he did not recognise it, struck him immediately as being familiar. He turned first of all to the signature, and saw that the note was from one of his old acquaintances, a man named Martin, who had no small reputation as a journalist and writer of magazine articles.

"Dear Holden," it ran, "I had an idea that you were somewhere in the west country, and got your address from your publisher. I am a little out of health, and have to do some stuff about Newlyn and the Newlyn men for a magazine. When this reaches you I shall be already at Penzance. Can't you manage to come over and see me? It will do you good."

Holden stood pondering for a moment.

Then Mrs Chegwidden turned from her labours. "Well," she said, "are your letters what you wanted? Is it good news from London?"

"What news is good?" said Holden. "They seem all right, but one can never tell." Then a thought occurred to him. "After all," he continued, "I shall not get my walk. Some of the letters want answering." He crossed the

kitchen to his own room, conscious of, and vaguely wondering as to the cause of, a novel curiosity in the regard which Mrs Chegwidden fixed on him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE arrival of Martin's letter at this juncture did not at first appear to him a matter for satisfaction. He was half inclined to ignore it altogether, or, at any rate, to reply to the invitation it contained with an uncompromising negative. For he felt himself singularly fooled and played upon by Fate, which had deluded him into the belief that this wild excursion, which must soon end so ignominiously, was the one course a wise man could adopt. He had imagined himself the recipient of a special revelation. He recognised at once that if he were to go over to see Martin he would be bound to declare that his desertion of London had altogether justified itself, and that he had found out the perfect way of life. He hardly felt himself in the mood to attempt such explanations, for it seemed to him he had doomed himself to stand for ever watching an experiment which had failed, and must yet go on for ever producing its heart-breaking results.

He took the letter into the little room at the back of the house, where he had chanced upon most of the critical moments in his life upon the island. The window was wide open; a thrush was singing somewhere in the dark hedge of escalonia that formed the boundary of the garden; in the distance sounded a faint murmur of the sea. Now and again a movement in the room above reminded him of Elsie.

He did not see that he could possibly do what Martin asked. He had risked everything because he thought there was no risk. He had failed ignominiously, and though to stay here in Scilly would be only to watch that failure grow and develop, he felt inclined to do so. At least he would be able thus to keep his troubles to himself, and would not be driven to the blasphemy of declaring himself reconciled to fate.

Presently he heard Elsie descending the stairs. He could have wished that she were dead, precisely because he loved her with such intensity, and must hereafter stand and watch, among other effects of his stupidity, the slow changing of that love to hate, or something very nearly allied to it. A moment later he saw her come into the garden. He had been sitting near the open window. Now he turned away a little, and pretended to read.

Elsie had come forth bare-headed into the garden. She wore a frock of pale grey, a deep flounce falling at the neck. There was a delicate pink bow at the breast. She moved about in the garden, gradually collecting from bush to bush a handful of pale pink monthly roses. Holden watched, and knew well that she had not come into the garden to gather flowers. He knew that she desired a reconciliation, and was willing enough that it should come about, though he would have preferred one of the sort which consists in the tacit ignoring of past differences. He could not be angry with her. But he was concious of the future, and could not but think their own agreement to a reconciliation mere foolishness, when all-powerful circumstances had doomed them to drift more and more apart as matters developed.

Elsie went to and fro in the garden, gradually drawing nearer to the window, at which she glanced from time to time. Holden went on reading his book. Finally he saw that his wife had found courage. She drew near to the window. He looked up.

She was leaning on the window-sill, her silky hair a little ruffled, her face slightly flushed. She played with the roses. "Guy," she said softly.

He looked up. "Yes."

She spoke, her eyes fixed upon the loose made roses. "I am very sorry. I——"

She paused again, and the colour flooded her cheeks. Holden was almost angry at her clumsiness; there was no reason why she should compel a recognition of the fact that they had come near to a vulgar quarrel.

"Sorry!" he echoed. "Why should you be sorry? There was nothing——"

Elsie darted one quick glance at him. "Guy," she said, interrupting him. "I don't think—I shall be happy enough here in Scilly for a long time to come."

Holden's irritation increased. She appeared to be fatuously resolved on emphasizing what he would have fain pretended to forget. It was foolish in her to show that she had recognised that he was angry, and to attempt to bribe him into good temper by a merely temporary withdrawal of her desires. For a moment he was at a loss for words. When he looked up to speak, Elsie was gone. In a few minutes he heard her in the room above. He half fancied he heard a sound of weeping. His eyes fell on Martin's letter, which had fallen to the floor at his feet. He found that he had changed his mind with regard to the invitation it held. Over at Newlyn, with Martin and the other men he would get to know, he would be able to forget everything that he was

now compelled to remember. He found, also, that his old interests were not by any means dead. It would be good to hear men talk of books and art again, and to know of what had been going on yonder in London during the time of his absence. True, the return would be no easy matter, but he saw that having made a vulgar error, he must expect to pay for it, and be content with such little intervals of freedom as the gods might vouchsafe.

He had soon made up his mind to go. He rose and sought Mrs Chegwidden, who was busy in the great kitchen, already almost in darkness. "I think I shall go over to Penzance to-morrow, Mrs Chegwidden," he said. "One of my old friends is stopping there for a day or two, and I should like to see him."

He did not understand the tone of her reply, and her face was hidden by the shadows. "Are 'ee goin' to take your wife?" she asked.

Here again, it seemed, was woman's love of having a scene recognised as such, when a man would have ignored it. "I think not," he answered. "I shall only be gone a day or two, and Elsie would hardly care for it."

"Well," said Mrs Chegwidden, "you must do what you like, I suppose. But I should ha' thought you'd ha' stopped at home now, and been glad to do it."

Still he did not understand. He went upstairs. He had been right about Elsie. She was stretched on her bed, and he saw as she raised her face in the dimness that she had been crying. He told her of Martin's letter, and of his intentions with regard to it. "Would you care to come?" he added. "To be frank, I don't think you'd find it very amusing. I am going only that I may talk with men who are keen on the things that I used to be keen on. You and I will take a holiday together in a few weeks' time. We might run up to Plymouth. They've theatres there."

Her voice had a new tenderness in it as she replied that she would rather he should go alone. He recognised the lovely change, and it seemed pitiful to him that they two, who had love, the one essential, should yet be doomed by circumstances to fall short of felicity. And suddenly a new amazement took him. Elsie flung her arms about his neck, and hiding her face, broke into a very passion of weeping. "Be good to me, Guy," she sobbed. "Be good to me."

He soothed and quieted her as best he might, being filled with pity, and cursing his own folly. Presently she grew calmer, and when the evening was come she had so completely recovered her self-possession that he could scarce believe the events of the

day had really happened outside the theatre of his mind. He went to bed almost reconciled to life.

In the morning, however, there was a change. He made ready to cross over to the mainland, but it was not without some little hesitation that he anticipated the meeting with Martin. He had found some peace at the end of the previous day, but it was only the peace of sleep. He perceived that the situation was in reality quite unchanged.

Elsie seemed to have forgotten everything. It was almost as if the events of the past six months were obliterated. Holden bethought him of the breakfasts when flower-packing was over, and half expected to see Cunnack enter and take his place at the head of the table. Elsie was cheerful and affectionate. He perceived that she was whole-heartedly pleased at the idea of his taking a few days of holiday.

He went down to the quay, and took his place upon the steamer. He was already well known in the place, and when Elsie had waved her farewells, and the boat moved out to sea, there were one or two passengers who endeavoured to enter into conversation with him. But he was not in the mood for talk. He lit a pipe, and, moving aft, watched the islands growing more and more remote.

He did not care to see the approach of the mainland, for the idea of the forthcoming interview grew more and more distasteful; not so much because he was naturally a very truthful man, as because he hated the trouble of deceiving for no good object.

Here on the steamer he stood, as it were, on neutral territory, where he could survey both past and future as from a distance. And his heart grew bitter within him. Folly and ignorance are the only sins that never escape due punishment.

He had been a fool when he obeyed his mood and left London, to make an experiment of simple life. He could have taken the punishment with a sufficiently good grace, had it fallen on himself only. But he could not tolerate the thought of a penalty that consisted in watching the ruin of his own life and Elsie's, and must needs be stretched out over a long period of time. One's failures can never be forgotten, but one can usually bury them somewhere out of sight, and the course is only decent. Holden saw himself going through life with that "body of death" his ruinous experiment for ever fastened to him.

The islands gradually died out of sight, and they neared the cliffs of the Land's End. He began to walk up and down the deck,

meditating bitterly. When Penzance was reached, he went straight to an hotel upon the promenade, deciding that he would not trouble to look up Martin until the morning.

He dined alone. When dinner was over, he lit a pipe and went out on to the promenade. It was a beautiful warm night, with stars more beautiful than the moon could be. The dark plain of the sea was lined with tremulous silver. Over on the western hillside shone the yellow lights of Newlyn; to the east one light showed the whereabouts of the Mount, whose presence was not otherwise to be guessed at. He remembered that other night when he had walked here. The verses which had come to him then recurred. He perceived in them a lamentable prophecy, if not also a fatal suggestion.

'Tis good to watch the yellow lights
Come out across the bay;
And well the music of your voice
Closes a perfect day.

Only . . . . the sunset seemed a rose
Full blown, whose leaves were falling;
And while I listen to your voice,
I hear the old sea calling.

A new thought struck him as he looked into the blue obscurity towards the Scillies. What was the use of trying to mend the irreparable?

Why, having failed, should one stay to have each day of his life remind him ever of the first? It was only decent to bury the dead, and if they refused to inhabit the graves which had been digged for them, a man could serve the same good end by running away and leaving them.

Fate had dealt unkindly with him. He had asked little enough in all conscience: merely that he might be permitted to live his own life, without the enslavement of labour. But he had come too near to perfect wisdom to escape the malice of the gods, who know that men would be happy, even as they are happy, did they but learn to moderate their desires and disregard unnecessaries. Therefore, they had brought a girl across his path, and he, loving her from the beginning, had immediately forgotten his wisdom, and become vulnerable as other men. For this reason his experiment had utterly broken down: Elsie seemed the victim of a gigantic folly.

The verses sang themselves over and over in his head. The sea seemed to translate them into its own murmur. And gradually Holden was filled with loathing of his situation. His dead were buried there in Scilly. Why should he go back to the old bondage?

He walked about on the promenade until it was deserted along all its length. Re-

entering his hotel, he called for pens and paper, and wrote a little note to Elsie, telling her he had made up his mind suddenly to go to London, and would write her immediately he reached town. He signed it "Your affectionate husband," and gave it to a waiter, bidding him see it was posted. The next morning he caught the mid-day train to London.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE train moved with its accustomed slowness through Cornwall, and Holden had full time to think upon what he had done and must do. The baseness of his action did not altogether come home to him. His feeling was that he was choosing the only possible way out of difficulties, which had been brought about against his will, if as the direct result of his actions. And by some inexplicable twist of thought, he imagined that Elsie would very quickly come to see that his desertion was all to her advantage. His purpose was to go and hide himself in London, and he was impatient until the journey should be at an end. He had no anticipations of happiness: his one desire was to escape the doom of contemplating his handiwork.

The one thing necessary was that he should avoid old friends so far as he could. When he reached Paddington, he had no particular

reason to go to one place rather than to another. But the desire to know that he had reached his place of refuge led him to take a hansom and tell the man to drive him to Victoria. As they came out of quieter squares and roads into Oxford Street, he found the noise and the swift lights marvellously comforting. He called to mind the night when he had acted on a mood of weariness, and imagined himself to be escaping for ever from the prison-house of London. He would have given the world for power to obliterate the year of his absence; for now that he had rejected London, and yet been compelled to come to it again, it must needs be a prison-house indeed. Everything which had made it tolerable before he must forego. He would hardly even be able to dine where he had been wont to dine.

He slept that night at an hotel hard by Victoria Station. The haggard dawn awoke him, and immediately there came the thought, that he must to-day complete his severance from the past by writing to Elsie.

First of all, however, he went and saw his lawyer, for he had resolved to make over the whole of his private income to his wife. This business almost broke his resolve before it was completed. The lawyer was discretion itself but he was an old man, and it came natural to him to think that all the world was base

Holden felt that he was smirching the fame of the child whose life he had spoilt, and more than once felt inclined to go back to her, and tell her what he had done, and implore her to join hands with him again, and strive to make the best of life. He would be willing to sacrifice all whims of his own if only they could somehow patch up an agreement and pledge themselves to mutual toleration. But the deed was presently made out—for he had demanded that the thing should be done quickly—and he signed it, much as a man might sign a warrant for his own immediate execution.

"You will leave us your address, Mr Holden?" said the lawyer, as he rose to go. "It may be necessary to communicate with you at some time or another."

"I have no address for the present," Holden replied, "and there will be no need for any communications. In fact, I do not desire them."

He left the office and walked slowly towards his hotel. He had now to write Elsie and acquaint her with his purpose; but he seemed to have lost all command of words. He had to tell her that he loved her, pitied her infinitely, and was filled with remorse; and yet that he had chosen to disappear out of her life. He knew that the thing would be heart-breaking to

her, and altogether incomprehensible. It was a poor enough little note when he gave up all attempts to better it.

"I have come to London," he wrote. "It was all my fault; I was a blundering fool to think I could make your happiness. Perhaps I will come back some day. But I think not. Try to forget everything."

He posted this letter and went out into the streets. The lights outside a music-hall struck his notice, and he entered almost without thinking what he did. The place had not altered in the year of his absence. The songs were stupid, and popular exactly as they took it for granted that all the world was base or vicious. One or two dances pleased him as of yore; but he sat smoking and took little note of what went on. His whole world was a purgatory, and he suffered here exactly as he must have suffered elsewhere.

The next day he bethought him of the future. He had only a few pounds with him, and if he was to live he must needs get money. Moreover, even if he had been free from pecuniary difficulties, he must still have worked, and worked hard, for he knew that work is the only anodyne, and sheer fatigue the one thing that enables a man to sleep. He would have to begin again at the beginning, or almost at the beginning, for he was resolved that he would

keep the secret of his presence in London from those who had known him before.

He took lodgings in a little street off the Strand, for his brief experience of country quiet had served to intensify his original hatred of the suburbs, where one must hear each separate raucous cry of the street hawkers, and never feel that merging of one's individual life in the life of a great crowd which is the secret of the spell of London. And, having got into his rooms, he began to realise his punishment.

The distractions which he had called essential in the former days of his London life he had now to go without; he could no longer dine where men dined in the greatest comfort, nor go to those places of amusement which had bored him least of old time. London is big enough, but if it be made up of many worlds, each of them is singularly small; and for a hundred reasons he would not risk meeting his old acquaintances when it was possible to avoid them. As a matter of fact, there were some unfortunate meetings, but the men had made new acquaintances and drifted into new cliques, so that it was not difficult for him to avoid them.

Another reason that kept him from his old resorts was the simpler one of poverty. He could have got work in plenty had he chosen to seek for it in the right quarters, but this he

could not do, inasmuch as to do so would have been to go to old friends and explain something at least of what had befallen him. This he could not do, and so it was necessary that he should begin almost at the beginning again. His publisher employed him as a reader occasionally, and urged him to hasten to the end of the novel he had begun while he was at Scilly. But for the most part he relied altogether upon hard work and his knowledge of the game.

He had fresh reason to blaspheme against his art. For a time he religiously abstained from letting any part of what had happened during his absence from London get into his copy. But having nothing else to, and needing an anodyne, he worked gigantically. Material which might have lasted an ordinary man for months was used up to the best advantage in the course of as many weeks. His work gave him no pleasure, but afforded the nearest approach to happiness of which he was capable.

One day he had no subject to his hand. It was late in February, and a soft wind was blowing from the west. The thoughts of Scilly gave him no rest, nor could he set himself to escape them by working. And suddenly he resolved to forget by the bold method of remembering; he would put certain passages of his life upon paper.

He began to write at once, and the next few weeks saw the completion of a series of papers in which his late experiences were set forth. The idylls captured first of all the editor of an evening paper, and afterwards the readers of his paper. There was no vaguest reference to Elsie from first to last; but in all of them was a faint sadness—the sadness of the sea, and of the spring. It was their only merit, and he knew it was all Elsie. He remembered a boy he had known formerly who had heard news of the most heart-breaking, and said only: "One was sent into the world to get copy, and there's copy in this." He wondered in his self-contempt how long it would be before he frankly took to making copy out of the wife he had abandoned. Meanwhile the idylls went on appearing. A publisher saw them, and soon wrote to ask the unknown author for a volume.

Elsie's image haunted him perpetually. He had known from the first that what he had seemed driven to do would be quite incomprehensible to her. He could not solace himself with the reflection that she would console herself with hating him. A part of his damnation was the certain knowledge he possessed that she would have refused to believe the evidence of his conduct against his love. He imagined her desperately refusing to despair;

and clinging to that foolish half-promise of his to go back to her some day. He knew that if he were to go back she would receive him gladly, and without reproaches; looking upon him as one whom evil spirits had taken and driven forth into the wilderness, keeping him there while their power lasted. She would be longing for his return. He realised that, since a man is a creature gifted with free-will, himself was as the god to whom she offered her entreaties.

The gradual approach of the spring, that comes so exquisitely in London, did but intensify his pain. He toiled on, now at his novel, and now at the things which in the old days he would have called "labour"; and both kinds of work had the same sole merit in his view: they kept him occupied. But the sap was rising; the turf was green; there were spring flowers in the streets, and a magic difference in the air robbed him of all peace.

He became the most frequent of visitors to Covent Garden in the grey morning hours. There were still the piles of daffodils, the scarlet anemones, and they brought back to him the days of a year ago when he and Elsie had taken part in the work of the flower-farm. Sometimes he would search until he had found the familiar boxes which bore the name of her uncle's successor, and then he would buy some

bunches, and wonder if she had gathered and packed them, or, at the least, walked near them while they were growing. He took it for granted that she had, and so they seemed laden with messages and prayers from her. For he knew she would envy the flowers their chance of finding him; and that she knew he had been fond of them even before he had met her where they grew. They had a magic import too; if they had not brought him to the Market on that far-away morning, he would never have gone over to Scilly, and met her, and ruined her life and his.

The spring went on, until it was no longer a dear intruder only, but the gay queen of an exquisite world. There was a long space of sunny days and pleasant winds. He went one afternoon into the Park, and took a seat in the quietest spot he could find. He had been sitting there for some time, the old thoughts making him a very careless spectator of what went on around him, when he felt a touch on his knee and heard a little noise of laughter.

He looked down. A child of two or thereabouts was regarding him with laughing eyes, and striving to climb upon his knee. It had run away from its mother, who now advanced to where Holden was sitting. She was very young and girlish, and dressed simply, but he recognised at once that the child was her own.

She apologised, and would have led it away, but the child avoided capture for a moment, and laughed gleefully. It looked from Holden to the mother and back again at Holden. "Papa!" it said delightedly.

The word struck Holden dumb with pain. He saw that the mother had recaptured her offspring; but he sat dumb because of the light which had come upon him. He had thought himself blind and a fool before, but this——

"Elsie! Elsie!" he murmured, picturing her a child among the flowers. He had sinned beyond atonement; sinned so that the one possible punishment would be the continual knowledge of his act. "Be good to me!" she had said, and he had acted thus.

A moment earlier he had imagined he suffered. Now he found only the one thing desirable: an annihilation which should stretch back to before his birth and blot out every token of his existence. Among the fresh green leaves, in the clear sunlight, he could have cried aloud for the comforting obscurity of the grave.

CHAPTER XV.

ON the day when Holden set forth upon his disastrous journey to the mainland, Elsie followed him to the gate and watched the receding figure. He had no sooner passed out of sight than she began to wish vehemently that she had accompanied him to the quayside, and even accepted his offer to take her with him if she desired to go. There had been a great change in her, or the realisation of a great change, within the past few days, and her heart went after him.

Mrs Chegwidden was busy within the house, and presently Elsie went in to her. She looked up as the girl entered. "I wonder you didn' go over with him yourself," she said. "You wouldn' have been a bit the worse for a few days' change."

"Oh," said Elsie, "it is only for a few days that he will be away, and I have plenty to do here. I shall be busy until——"

"Iss, iss," said Mrs Chegwidden. "I warrant you will be busy enough. But a change would have done 'ee good."

Elsie spoke on quietly, in the voice of one who has her own thoughts to think.

"Do you remember the trouble you had with me when I was a child?" she said. "I hated the thought of your sewing lessons, and nothing could have convinced me that when I had learned what you had to teach me I should ever be glad of the knowledge. But I am glad. 'Twould be a terrible thing now if I had to give up the smallest part of the work to anyone else."

Mrs Chegwidden laughed. "Ah," she said, "I told 'ee how 'twould be, though you would never believe it. And now you'll be sewing your very heart into every stitch that you make. Iss, I warrant you're glad."

She paused, and Elsie took her hat from where it was lying. "I think I will go out for a little while," she said.

"If you're going down town——" began Mrs Chegwidden.

"I am only going for a walk," said Elsie. "I don't think I will go in that direction."

As a matter of fact, she could not abide within the house while there was a chance of saying farewell, in a manner, to her husband. He had become everything to her, and she

could not forget that he was going every moment further and further away from her.

She left the house and mounted slowly towards an elevation whence it would be possible to see the boat as soon as it should come out from under the shelter of the island. Great blocks of granite, weathered and lichen-grown, were strewn in the midst of fragrant heather, and overhead a lark sang rapturously. She stood and waited, a slim and lonely figure in scarlet, watching the scattered islands and the purple sea, a look in her face which had never been visible there before.

It had seemed to her that when the boat appeared she would be able to recognise her husband, and perhaps convey to him some token of her presence, watching him. When the boat at last appeared the foolish hope was seen to be vain, and she could only watch.

She knew that he was going from her for only a few days, and she had said already that she had plenty to occupy her hands and thoughts during the interval. But moods such as hers are altogether beyond the governance of reason, and she watched the receding boat with a sinking heart. It grew more distant, and at last was hardly visible on the horizon.

She looked about her in that lonely place; then, with the air of one who does something remarkably courageous, she suddenly flung a

kiss in the direction of the boat. "Come back to me," she murmured. "Come back to me quickly!" The colour of the sea had turned to ashen grey, and dusty-looking rain-clouds had covered the sky. A certain chilliness in the light wind blowing became noticeable. Elsie shivered and turned towards home. Her face would hardly have been different had she been returning from the funeral of someone dear to her.

The rain had begun before she reached the house, and it continued with a dismal persistence all through the day. Elsie had her work to do, as she had said, but she was possessed by an uncontrollable restlessness, and found it impossible to settle herself to any occupation. Mostly she stood in the little room where Holden was accustomed to work. The rain dripped from the eaves, the pale pink roses grew hourly more dishevelled, and the scattered shrubs shivered miserably in the petulant wind.

Old Mrs Chegwidden, her sole companion, did her best to combat the mood of depression whereof she could not fail to be conscious, though it was with but little effect. The task might have been easier had not the day been so long. Behind drawn curtains and in the comfortable warmth of blazing fagots it would have been natural to settle to some indoor task and forget

the misery that reigned without. As it was, Elsie could not get herself away from the window, or cease to think of the dismalness of the interminable day, in which she was herself so far from happiness.

They took their tea early and lingered over it a long time. But even so they could not be content. Conversation languished, and the sound of the rain and the whining little wind were audible through all. At last Mrs Chegwidden made a desperate effort to effect a diversion.

"I wouldn' have thought one man could make such a difference," she said. "But there's no denying the house is wonderful quiet without him. Do 'ee think you would care to go out for a bit? The rain edn' enough to hurt 'ee, though it do make a drilgey old noise about the house. Shall us walk down town and call upon Mrs Symons for a bit? 'Twould be a charity, too, for I'll promise she don't see much company since Artie went abroad."

She spoke of a woman whose son and only child had lately been tempted by the prospect of high wages to emigrate to South America. Elsie was fond of her, but at the present moment she had no desire for company. "If I went out," she said, "I fancy I should go alone. But I would rather stay in."

"Come to think upon it," said Mrs Cheg-

widden, persevering, "there's no need to go paying calls upon your friends to-night. There's an entertainment down to the chapel. I wonder how I came to forget about it? Shall us put on cloaks and bonnets and go down there? I could enjoy a song to-night."

"I will go if you like," said Elsie, "but I would rather stop in the house. If you want music I will try to sing to you presently, when we have lit the lamp and made it evening."

"My dear child," cried her companion, "you mustn't think that I do care about anything of the sort. I'm a sight too old for that. If you would rather stop in the house I shall be all the better pleased. Comfort is all that I do look to nowadays, so long as you are well and happy."

She recognised her failure and wisely bowed to circumstances. Divers household activities busied them for a while, and then Mrs Chegwidden had her reward. There was a sound of footsteps without, and then the latch was lifted, and a woman was seen divesting herself of a wet cloak and carefully wiping her dirty boots. In a moment she bustled into the room and addressed Elsie. She was none other than the Mrs Symons of whom they had been speaking.

"Good-evening, my dear. I suppose you're surprised to see me on a night like this, but I bin workin' hard all day about the house, and

come evening I got thinkin' about Artie till my heart was in my boots, and so I thought I would come up and have a bit o' talk with Mis' Chegwidden. I suppose she edn' gone to the entertainment?"

"No," said Elsie; "and I am sure she'll be very glad to see you."

"Iss," came the answer. "I reckon she's like me, too well up in years to care 'bout entertainments, and such-like. But I wonder you aren't gone; though, 'tis true, you've got your husband. I suppose he's busy about his writing."

"No," said Elsie patiently. "He has gone over to Penzance for a few days' holiday."

"I wonder you didn' go yourself," said the woman. "I should ha' made him take me if I was you, for what's good for the gander is good for the goose. But, there, I suppose he was in need of it. It must be terrible wearing, that writing. I wondered where he was going to when he passed the house this morning, but I didn' notice he had his bag with him. I suppose you sent the boy down with that?"

Elsie, it has been stated, was very fond of this woman. Indeed, she could not well be otherwise, inasmuch as she had in memory a host of kindnesses received at her hands during the whole of her lifetime. But Mrs Symons was to her very largely a representative

example of the people among whom she had hitherto lived with so little contentment. Her interests in life had always seemed utterly unattractive to this girl, enamoured of a vaguely-imagined existence where the events of every day would be more moving than the most unusual happenings of Scilly ; and to-night her conversation was an infliction not to be tolerated.

Fortunately Mrs Chegwidden came presently to Elsie's rescue, and the two friends discussed the little events of the locality with infinite relish. In reality, they talked of matters not to be surpassed for importance, since their conversation was all of lives made happy by love, or miserable by sin and folly : of children newly born, or of men and women dead or struggling not to die. They had so intimate a knowledge of the people of whom they talked, of their antecedents, and of their circumstances, that the tales they told were as poignant to them as to the actors themselves. They knew a hundred people with an intimacy possible to the dweller in big cities only betwixt himself and his wife. Yet Elsie listened only with a considerable effort of self-restraint, and presently even that failed.

She rose and crossed to the room where Holden worked, and there she lit a lamp and busied herself with little efforts to improve

the arrangement of pictures, china-ware, and such-like trifles. The others heard her through the half-open door, and presently they were talking softly and of her, glancing occasionally towards the room where she was moving about.

Mrs Symons was never at a loss for topics of conversation, but time is swift upon the wing when two friends are together, and at last she realised unwillingly that she must needs be going. She rose, and remembered a few more matters on which speech was necessary. Then, "Well, if I don't go, I shall stop here all the night," she said with an air of conviction.

She crossed the kitchen to the doorway of the room where Elsie was still trying to find occupation. "Good-bye, Elsie," she said. "My dear child, there's no need for you to put that room tidy. There's nothing like it in all Scilly as it is. Mr Holden ought to be a proud man, and I warrant that he is."

"Good-night," said Elsie, coming forward, and to her surprise the elder woman embraced and kissed her tenderly.

"Good-night, my dear," she said. "I wonder he could bear to go away from 'ee. But there, 'tis only for a day or two, and he'll be back before you know that he is gone."

Elsie withdrew herself rapidly. "Good-night," she said again, and she did not accompany the visitor to the door.

It was half an hour later that Mrs Chegwidden, busy with preparations for supper, heard a sound of weeping in the inner room. For a moment she stood stock-still, hardly believing her ears. Then she put down what she was carrying, and hastened to see what was the matter. She found Elsie sitting in a dark corner of the room, sobbing and crying with a passion fit to break the heart of the beholder.

She hurried to her side, and took her in her arms. "What is it?" she cried. "You'll do yourself some hurt. What is the matter with 'ee, dear child? You mustn't take anything to heart like that. What is it?"

Elsie's grief was unabated, and she did not answer. The woman, utterly bewildered and dismayed, held her to her breast, and renewed her entreaties.

"Did Mis' Symons say anything to hurt 'ee, or is it anything that I have said? I can't think what's troublin' of 'ee."

"It was nothing," Elsie said. "Only—I am afraid, if anything should happen to him, or if——"

"Hush, my dear," said the woman, soothing her like a child. "What do 'ee fancy is going to happen to him? Why, he's only gone for a day or two, and, come to think upon it, I shouldn' be frightened if he was back by to-morrow's boat: you may be sure he won't be

able to stay long, and what is there can happen to him on a little journey like that? Hush, my dear; I can't bear to hear 'ee cryin'."

"I know there is no reason to be afraid," answered Elsie, sobbing still, and hiding her face. "But 'tis a thing I can't help. I was near to being cross with him only a few hours ago, and 'twould be like a judgment if he was taken. I am afraid I can't be otherwise."

Mrs Chegwidden came of a race that is intensely emotional, but she had a vast deal of practical wisdom. She recognised that for the moment Elsie was just as much a child as she had been in the earlier years the present scene recalled, and so she treated her precisely as she would have done in those days.

"You've done too much," she said. "The thing for you to do is to go to bed, and let me make you a cup of something hot. A good night's sleep is all that's wanted to make you happy as a bird."

Having once decided on a course of action, she did not rest until Elsie was in bed; she took her up the food she had prescribed, and watched her swallow it, talking pleasantly the while. Presently it was finished. She took the cup from Elsie, and kissed her tenderly. "There," she said soothingly, "all you've got to do is to go to sleep, and in the morning you will be well again."

Elsie obeyed her like a child, and turned to sleep. An hour later Mrs Chegwidden entered the room with a carefully shaded candle in her hand. "Dear child!" she murmured, as she looked down on Elsie, who slept most peacefully. "'Twill be all right in the morning."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE rain passed over during the night. The wind freshened a little, and the day was of a singular beauty. Mrs Chegwidden had not made her prescription in vain. Elsie had slept the night through, and she came down with all her fears forgotten.

"Did 'ee have a good sleep?" asked the matron. "You do look well enough."

"I slept beautifully," said Elsie. "I am as happy as needs be this morning, and desperately ashamed of myself."

"Aw, my dear, there's no need for that. I can understand that you felt lonely, but it won't be for long. I shouldn' be frightened if he was back before night. Iss, I wouldn' say but what he is eating his breakfast now, and longing for the time to come when the steamer do start."

"I hope not," Elsie answered. "To-day shall not be like yesterday, and he will be the better for his change. I can wait happily enough for a few days longer."

It seemed that she had not over-estimated her powers of cheerfulness, for the day passed pleasantly enough until well on in the afternoon. Then Elsie, who had been watching the clock for an hour past, took her hat and started for the village.

"Goin' down to meet him, are 'ee?" asked Mrs Chegwidden.

"He will not come to-day," said Else. "But there may be a letter."

Mrs Chegwidden laughed. "Go on," she said, "but I warrant we shall be three in the house to-night."

After that she busied herself with household affairs, her reflections, which were of the pleasantest, making the work a delightful occupation. "Lord," she said once, half aloud, "what a change in that child in one little year. She edn' like the same. She can't rest so long as he is away."

Her occupation kept her from noting the passage of time, but presently the clock, in striking the hour, reminded her that it had done so twice before since Elsie left the house. "Wherever can she be?" she murmured. "We shall be fine and late before we take our tea. I suppose she's called in somewhere for a while, or perhaps the boat was late."

Tea was the good woman's one luxury, and

presently she could go no longer without the accustomed stimulant. She laid the cloth and brewed the tea. Then, "Whatever is come to Elsie?" she murmured again. Unwilling to begin without her, she went to the door and leaned over the little gateway, looking up and down the road that passed outside.

For a time she waited in vain, but presently Elsie appeared in the distance, coming not from the town, but from the direction of the lonely place where she had stood to watch the steamer on the previous day. Mrs Chegwidden hailed her coming with delight. "Make haste," she cried, while Elsie was still at some little distance. "The tea is made this four or five minutes, and 'twill be clean spoiled if it is not drunk at once. So you didn' find your husband?"

By this time Elsie was close at hand, and Mrs Chegwidden was aware of a most disquieting change in her appearance. "Didn' you get so much as a letter?" she asked.

"Yes," said Elsie quietly, as she entered the house. "There was a letter."

Her face was pale and set. She talked in a voice altogether without expression.

"Well," said Mrs Chegwidden, "I warrant he edn' stopping long. When do he say that he will be back? Not later than to-morrow, I suppose."

"He doesn't say when he is coming back," said Elsie.

"But what else can he have to say? Surely he had no bad news to tell 'ee?"

"No," said Elsie. "He does not say that anything is wrong. He hardly says anything except that he is going to London."

"Going to London, and without you?" cried Mrs Chegwidden, with not a little show of indignation. "That's fine goings-on for one that's so short a time married, and knows what he knows of his wife. What is it takes him to London? I wonder he didn' speak of it before he left yesterday. He can't have proper clothes. I know he didn' have his tall hat, and he've told me they do wear them all the time in London."

"He does not say what takes him there," said Elsie. "It is only a little note. Perhaps he made up his mind suddenly, and had no time to write at greater length. I expect he has gone to see some publisher on business matters. It is not always easy to arrange things by letter."

"Well," said Mrs Chegwidden, "I should have thought he would write more than that. Going to London is no small thing, and he might have known you would be wondering why he went."

Elsie's look was a little piteous, and her lip

quivered. "He must have forgotten," she said. "He promises to write from London, and I expect he will not be long. . . . But what about your tea? We must drink it at once, or it will be spoiled."

She suffered more than a little while the meal was in progress. Mrs Chegwidden was so fond of Holden, and Elsie's marriage had so entirely met with her approval, that she allowed herself to be moderately critical of his actions. She would not be silent as to his sudden decision in a matter that ought to have been discussed with his wife, and Elsie, whom the sudden announcement had hurt more than the elder woman guessed, had the "work of the world," according to the local phrase, to control herself under the infliction.

She was not aware, of course, of the decision which had resulted in this precipitate journey to London. She believed absolutely in the truth of the explanation she had found when Mrs Chegwidden demanded it, supposing that, finding himself upon the mainland, he had suddenly recognised that there was some business advantage to be secured by going to London, and had acted without thought. She did not blame him for this thoughtlessness; but she was a woman, and wondered a little that he had not perceived how surely she would associate this little thing—in itself a matter of not the least

importance—with the events which had befallen just before he received the letter which had taken him away from the island.

In the meantime she had to convince Mrs Chegwidden that her husband's actions were beyond criticism, being a matter betwixt herself and him alone. In this task she presently succeeded, but in the end she went miserable to bed. Had she been left alone, she would have rested content with the justification she had evolved for his carelessness to her. But Mrs Chegwidden made her think, despite herself, more of the other side of the affair than was good.

There was just a possibility that the promised letter from her husband might arrive the next day. Once, when they were upon their wedding journey, she had seen him write a forgotten letter in the train, and this chance action of his, being remembered, served for a precedent. Arrived at Paddington, too, he would have more time than was needed for the writing of the few words that she craved if he should scribble them before he left the station. She wondered, as she lay sleepless, whether the train that was now rushing westward through the darkness was bringing her such a note.

She was awake full early, and came down singing to the great cool kitchen, where Mrs Chegwidden was awaiting her.

"Well," said the old lady, "you're seemin' in some good spirits to-day. I suppose you do fancy there will be a letter for 'ee by-and-by?"

Elsie flushed prettily. "There can hardly be one to-day. That would mean his writing while he was still in the train, or as soon as he reached the end of his journey. He would be tired then, and waiting his dinner. He would be wanting to ride in a hansom through London even more, for all he pretends to hate the place. No, we must not expect the letter until to-morrow at the earliest. He will be writing to-day."

This was the reasonable view of the matter, and perhaps, since she could by no means accept it within herself, it was right and proper that she should attempt to impose it on her companion. In cases of this kind one is apt to develop doubts of the wisdom of one's unreasonable hopes as soon as another person gives them any support.

The day, as was but natural, seemed unconscionably long. After the mid-day dinner Mrs Chegwidden had to go into St Mary's. "I'll stop until the post is in," she said in parting. "That will save you the trouble of coming down."

Elsie laughed lightly. "Oh," she said, "'tis no use you thinking. He would never think of writing so early that I could get his letter to-day."

This she said instead of explaining that she would not be likely to wait in the house until her companion's return. She expected the letter.

She busied herself with her needlework for a time. Then she put on her hat and started for the village, coming face to face with Mrs Chegwidden at the door of the post-office.

"You was right after all," said the latter. "There's plenty for me, but none for you. . . . . Why, I believe you are disappointed, for all you was so certain there was no chance of a letter. Well, I've always said that they that never hope for nothing are the ones to be most disappointed when 'tis just what they do get."

They walked back together to the house, Elsie feeling more disappointed than she would have admitted. Again Mrs Chegwidden could not withhold the expression of her wonder that Holden should have gone upon this long journey at so small a notice, and that, having gone, he should have forgotten to explain the reasons of his absence to those who would naturally desire to be informed as to their nature.

Upon the next day Elsie left the house more than an hour before the boat was likely to arrive.

"Now make haste back, as soon as you've got the letter," said Mrs Chegwidden as she went. "You may be sure you'll have

it to-day, and you can hardly be more curious yourself about what took him to London than I am."

"You'll find I am right," said Elsie gaily. "He has gone to see a publisher about a book, and he is coming back at once."

She knew it was too early for going down into St Mary's, and so she turned up the road, and went to the place where she had watched before. The boat was coming in the distance, and Elsie sat in the sunlight against a slab of granite overgrown with lichens of scarlet, yellow, and orange, watching it and wondering what it would bring to her. It had drawn near to the island, and disappeared as it made for the shelter of the harbour, before she rose and went down to St Mary's.

Mrs Chegwidden was at no loss for occupations, and during the time of Elsie's absence had little time for thought. Some two or three hours had passed when she heard the gate creak upon its hinges, and turned expectantly towards the open door.

In another moment Elsie entered, and the woman knew without a word being spoken that something was desperately wrong.

"What is the matter? she cried. "There's some bad news. He edn' dead?"

"No," said Elsie, chokingly. "He is gone away."

"But what do you mean?" said Mrs Chegwidden. "He's gone, but he'll be back before long, I suppose. What was it took him to London?"

"It was all my fault," said Elsie. "He says so, but I do not understand. Read the letter. What have I done to make him think of doing this?"

She thrust into the woman's hands the letter Holden had written on the morning after his arrival in London, stating his mad resolve to desert her, because he had ruined her life. Mrs Chegwidden took it from her, and tried to read it—vainly, because of the excitement from which she suffered.

Suddenly a little pitiful gasp aroused her to consciousness of her companion's condition. Elsie had fainted. The older woman was just in time to catch her as she fell.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOLDEN'S letter fell literally like a thunderbolt upon Elsie, and at first it left her stunned and incapable of realising what it meant or why he had sent it. Even when days had gone by, and she had begun to understand that he did not mean to return to her, she was like one upon whom a sudden cloud of darkness had descended in the midst of the day.

On one point, however, her mind was made up, and she knew how to act. Mrs Chegwidden's anger knew no bounds, and it would have pleased her at first if all the world had known of Holden's infamy. She talked with infinite tenderness to Elsie, continually striving to comfort her, yet always conscious that something stood between them, so that her best intentions failed of their effect. She would fain have eased her soul by speaking her thoughts concerning Holden, but Elsie would not permit her the liberty she desired.

"You must never let yourself think that he will not come back," she insisted. "He says 'perhaps I will come back,' and I know that he will do it. Do you think I could have lived, even for these few days, if I were not sure of that? We must tell people that business has taken him to London, and you must not blame him for this. I know him. Some day he will be longing to give everything so that this that he has done may be undone. He has not done it lightly, and he is as wretched—wherever he may be—as I am. I do not understand, but he thought there was nothing else he could do. He will come back some day. He must or I shall die."

After this Mrs Chegwidden developed a surprising faculty for white lies. People were naturally curious as to the object of Holden's journey, and, being curious, they had no scruples in the matter of asking for information. For all these Mrs Chegwidden—who was a hero in the way in which she made herself a screen for Elsie—had but one answer: "They that have got to do with the making of books are bound to be in London a lot. A man can write a book anywhere if it's in his nature to do it, but he must go to London to sell it, and have it printed; and even so, 'tis not a job you can get through in a hurry. Mr Holden is gone to London to see about a book."

Having thus perjured herself and mortified her desires—which were to find an opportunity of saying what she thought of Holden—she had to go back and exercise a form of reticence that was still less to her liking.

A week had passed, and there came a letter from Holden's lawyer in London, telling her of the provision that had been made for her. Man is a creature singularly obtuse, but even a man so plunged in folly as Holden was should have seen that this act of his was the very superfluity of unkindness, aggravating to the last degree his offence against the wife he had left.

Moreover, the letter destroyed one of her dearest hopes, since it told her that Holden had left no address with his lawyer. She saw at once that publishers and editors were likely to be in the same darkness with regard to his whereabouts. The knowledge distressed her infinitely.

"Did not I say that he was not to be blamed?" she said to her companion, who listened in uncomprehending bewilderment, her anger against Holden increasing as she heard him defended by his wife. "He would be back in a day if I did but know his address, but he knows that I would call him back if I knew that, and he is ashamed of the thing he has done, and so hides himself lest it should

seem he was not to suffer. He is one that often does a thing all the more thoroughly because he would give his heart to undo the beginning of it long before he is come to the middle."

"'Tis no use for you to tell me," said Mrs Chegwidden conclusively. "I do understand that I aren't allowed to speak a word against him, but aw, my dear, I do wish you could find it in 'ee to love 'en less."

"'Tis no use to hope for that," said Elsie, "and if it did come to pass I should be in a worse plight than I am in now. I should have nothing to live for if that change came to me. As it is, I have the hope that he will come back to me some day. He has promised, and I have not known him break his word."

This hope of his ultimate return was the thing she clung to in life, and presently she was driven to shut herself up with it, for she got no encouragement from without, and the weeks and months that went by without a word from Holden made it hard for her to retain her faith. Her salvation was that she had to maintain her hold on that if she would not relinquish life itself.

She ended by developing a histrionic talent that frequently came near to deceiving Mrs Chegwidden herself. Elsie did not know of the extent to which the islanders were discussing

Holden's absence. All the subterfuges in the world would not have prevented them finding an explanation of his going away when none was vouchsafed by those who knew the truth. Elsie played her part magnificently, but, if she had but known it, she was left in ignorance as to the feeling of those around her only because they well knew that matters had gone wrong betwixt her and her husband, and that her outward show of contentment covered a heart near to breaking.

They had need of little enough intuition to perceive this much. The strain upon Elsie was intolerable, for there were those among her friends whose kindness impelled them to call upon her at this season, and when they called it was not often that Holden's absence was left without a mention. She was resolved to be strong, but the natural pallor of her face turned to a pitiful dead whiteness, and the whole of her features began to take the peaked, strained expression of one who is never free for long together from severe physical pain. Her voice, too, had in it a pathos altogether new. To look at her, and hear her speak, increased the fervid indignation of Mrs Chegwidden against the absent husband.

There was inevitably some lack of sympathy betwixt herself and Elsie, for her love and pity for the girl were naturally associated with the

anger that she might not name against Holden. Thus her sufferings were hardly less than Elsie's, for she continued loyal, and never allowed herself to discuss the subject with her friends.

The winter came, and the long evenings were worse than the long days had been. The woman's heart grew bitter against Holden as she saw how Elsie's burden became daily more and more intolerable. But the Spring delays not in those temperate regions, and the flowers came very early. The Spargos had kept on the farm, and Elsie turned gladly to the old work, to which they welcomed her with a pleasure they were half afraid to speak, lest they should betray the depth of their pity for her.

The flowers comforted her as nothing else had done. Their loveliness, their fragrance, and the way in which these tempted her to forget her private sorrows, and go on gathering bunch after bunch—all these were medicine. She found, as Holden had once discovered, that peace is the heritage of all who spend their days among the things that grow out of the good earth. She knew, too, that it was the flowers which had in the first place brought Holden to the islands: she was sure in her own heart that he could not look upon a daffodil or scarlet anemone without thinking of her, and so

she cherished a hope, with every fresh flower gathered, that this would be the messenger to bring her husband back to her.

Another strange effect of her cogitations in this time of trouble is worthy of note. She had at seasons felt it almost impossible to go on believing in Holden's love for her, yet in the main she succeeded in holding the faith she had explained to Mrs Chegwidden soon after the receipt of his second letter. She thought of him as held a prisoner because of his love for her, and because he knew that forgiveness would be his when he should ask for it. Unconsciously, therefore, her view of London changed, for it had become the sordid hell in which he was shut up. She forgot her dislike for Scilly. It would be a paradise, she felt, if only he could be brought back, and this episode forgotten.

The lovely spring grew older. There was one Roscorla dwelling in London, a native of the islands, who had been a friend of Cunnack's, and had been greatly taken by Elsie on the occasion of certain visits to his home. This, perhaps, was mainly due to the fact of her passion for all that concerned the city, which ministered to the harmless vanity of the countryman turned Londoner. To him had been sent some account of what had befallen, and he had been seeking news of Holden. He

found no trace of him, however; nor, inasmuch as he spent more than the half of his waking time in those regions east of the Bank which were unknown ground to Holden, was it likely that he would do so.

But Elsie still hoped, and the need to go on living as though she had no trouble became a terrible thing to her. She had come to long, as Mrs Chegwidden did, for some event that should break down the barrier between them, and let her open her heart fully to the older woman. But the event was needed before the barrier could be broken down. Both were helpless to do of themselves what they desired to do.

There came an afternoon half-way through March, when it occurred to Mrs Symons to quit her home in the village and call at the flower-farm. The good woman could not understand the attitude of the two who dwelt there. "Business keeps him in London," they still persisted in saying of the absent one, though all the world knew that there were never any letters from him, and that Elsie was eating her heart out with longing for his return. Perhaps a certain reticence was proper as regarded the public in general. But, for herself, she was so old a friend of the family that she felt entitled to altogether different treatment. She did not so much resent the

pride of the two women: it was rather that she deemed their conduct unreasonable.

It happened, unfortunately, that Mrs Chegwidden was out of the way when the visitor arrived, and so it fell to Elsie's lot to receive and make her welcome.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs Symons, "I'm come again. I haven' seen you nor Mrs Chegwidden this weeks past, and I thought perhaps you might have a cup of tea for me; so I just locked up the house and came up to see how you was gettin' on."

"It is very good of you to come," said Elsie. "I am all alone for the present, but it is not long to tea-time, and you may be quite sure of aunt's being here then."

"Iss, I suppose," said the other. "Well, if I'm welcome, I'll just put off my cloak and bonnet. 'Tis warmer than you'd think, walking in the sun."

She made herself comfortable, and then renewed the conversation.

"I wish I could ask 'ee how you was," she said. "But I can tell without asking that you aren't but poorly. You're looking whisht with that white face of yours. I don't like to see 'ee lookin' like that. You always used to be healthy, from a child up, and if you was pale it was never that kind of chalk whiteness."

Elsie bent across the table and shifted some

of the daffodils that stood there loosely arranged in a blue and white pot. "Oh," she said, "I am well enough, thank you. One is never quite oneself when the spring is newly come."

"I tell 'ee what would do you good," said Mrs Symons, "and that's to have your husband back again. 'Tis no wonder you are looking whisht with him away for months on end. 'Tis worse than marrying with one that's on the sea, for then you expect it, and you've got to have it; and what you've got to have is easier to put up with. But 'tis hard on you. Are 'ee expectin' of him back shortly?"

Elsie was still busy with the flowers. "I can hardly tell," she answered resolutely. "His business is taking longer than he expected, and it is very important. Still, I have the pleasure of looking forward to a surprise, for he may come at any time."

"Well," said Mrs Symons, "it passes me how you can put up with the loneliness of it. I wonder, too, that he is willing to be away—now of all times in the year—for even Scilly couldn' twenty-four hours from London."

Elsie could restrain herself no longer. "Surely it is a matter between him and me?" she cried. "And especially a matter for his judgment. He will come back as soon as he is able."

Mrs Symons apologised promptly, and at this

moment Mrs Chegwidden returned. She looked suspiciously at the visitor, and then flew quickly to Elsie's rescue. "Why, who'd ha' thought o' seeing you, Mis' Symons?" she exclaimed. "Have 'ee heard any news of Artie lately?"

Artie had obtained work at excellent wages, and for a long time the mention of his name made the visitor forgetful of Elsie's affairs. Yet throughout the time of her stay there were galling references to the matter as to which she was curious, and in the end Mrs Chegwidden found herself endeavouring to hasten her departure.

She saw the visitor to the door, and as soon as she had turned back into the house she knew that Elsie was coming to her for the sympathy she had been longing to give.

"Why are they so cruel?" she cried piteously. "They know that I am alone, and that Guy will not come back to me. Why do they come to question me, and look at me, and make quite certain that my heart is broken?"

"Aw, my dear," said Mrs Chegwidden, putting her arms about her, and drawing her towards the settle that stood by the great open hearth, "I could have bit my tongue out with vexation when I found that she was here. But it shall not happen again."

"I don't think it will matter long," sobbed

Elsie. "I think he has forgotten his promise, and will never come back. He must be dead, or he could not have kept away from me. I have prayed so; and he knows of the child that is coming."

Mrs Chegwidden hesitated, for she still dared not speak of Holden as she could have wished. "Poor lamb!" she said at last, smoothing Elsie's hair. "Poor lamb!"

"I am afraid," said Elsie. "I know that he loves me, and that he could not change in that. But he does not come back, and I am afraid—horribly afraid."

"I'm sure he'll come," said Mrs Chegwidden. "He couldn' keep away. But you must be brave and strong whatever do happen, for another's sake beside your own and his."

"Ah," sobbed the girl, "if he would return I could be brave. It is the loneliness!"

She clung to Mrs Chegwidden, sobbing bitterly, and the old woman strove to comfort her with little inarticulate endearments and tender caresses. The old relations were restored between them, and Elsie was no longer all alone.

It was a week or two later that Mrs Chegwidden put a little daughter into her arms, and she heard the voice of her child that wailed, and so gave her the distraction of having some one to comfort.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FROM the first the child progressed magnificently. Of Elsie, the women said that she would fare equally well when once she should have begun to "take notice" of it. But, though the child became very dear to her, she did not recover anything of her natural strength. It was not evident that she was in any way losing ground, but Mrs Chegwidden presently grew alarmed.

Apparently the doctor did the same, for one day, after a visit, when he found Elsie still in the same state of listlessness, he spoke to Mrs Chegwidden. "Look here: I have not been told everything I ought to know about my patient. It is her husband's absence that keeps her from gaining strength, and will presently kill her. Why is he away from her?"

Mrs Chegwidden's expression was one of despair. "Why, how can I tell 'ee?" she exclaimed. "She don't understand herself,

though she've tried often enough to explain it to me, poor dear. There was nothing but love between them, and to the day he went away for a little holiday in Penzance there was not the smallest sign of a quarrel. But he went from Penzance to London, and wrote a letter that neither of us could make out, saying that he was going to stop away. But there was a sort of a promise that he might come back, and Elsie is living upon that, and dying because he does not keep it. And, from what she's said, she do know in her own heart that he is all the time daggin' to come back, but ashamed to do that because of the manner of his going away. I do hate the man, doctor, but Elsie would be glad as a bird that flies home if only she could lie in his arms again."

"Well," said the doctor, "I don't wonder that you cannot explain the thing very clearly. I have not met that kind of man myself, though there is no end to the foolishness of women when they love. Have you tried to bring him back?"

"There's no hearing where he is," said Mrs Chegwidden. "Mr Roscorla have been trying to find him, but I fancy he don't go much in the company of literary men, and so he've got but a poor chance of finding him."

"I suppose not," answered the doctor. "But unless he is found it will go ill with Elsie. If

what she thinks of him is true, one could almost wish—except for her sake—that he would stop away for a month longer, say. For I suppose it would be a punishment to him to find himself a widower. But it is my business to bring her through this, and so I tell you that he must be brought back to her."

Mrs Chegwidden regarded him despairingly. "I know it, doctor," she said.

It was a day on which they were sending flowers to London, and when she mounted to Elsie's room Mrs Chegwidden paused at the open door. Elsie was sitting up in bed, her face bowed over a box of big daffodils, her hair falling and hiding it. Her lips were moving, and she was speaking in a murmur. The box had been brought up at her request half-an-hour earlier, and Mrs Chegwidden knew that the flowers would go to London laden with such prayers as women do not put up to God.

It was perhaps this scene that gave her an idea upon which she presently acted.

"Are 'ee feelin' a little bit stronger to-day?" she asked. Then, lying without hesitation, "Doctor is fine and pleased with you to-day. 'Tis wonderful what one night will do sometimes. He do seem to think you aren't like the same person."

Elsie smiled a little wearily. "Has only one night gone by since he was here? The time is

so long that I could almost fancy it a year. It is a lifetime since Guy went away. Oh, if he would come back! But I think he is dead."

Mrs Chegwidden was silent for a moment. A sense of Elsie's awful weakness, of her white face, and the change in her soft voice, made it impossible for her to speak. Moreover, her anger against Holden gave her pause even when the words were already upon the tip of her tongue. But Elsie's white face, and the absolute dejection of the gesture with which she put aside the flowers, appealed to her too strongly for this to be long regarded.

"So you do love him still?" she asked unsteadily.

"Better than ever I loved him, for I know now what it is to live without him. I shall die for love of him if he does not come back."

"Did 'ee never think upon another plan than waiting here in Scilly? You have said that he is stopping away because he is ashamed to come back, and I believe you know him. Have 'ee never thought that every day will make it harder for him?"

"What shall I do?" asked Elsie, flushing, leaning forward.

"Do 'ee mind the tale of the foreign woman in the history books that came to London when her English lover didn' come back to her? She didn' know one word of the language, nor

where he was likely to be found. His name was all, and she went wandering round the streets speaking it, until she came upon him. Such is the nature of man that he was glad she was come after him, though he wouldn' go back to fetch she. Do 'ee think you could muster strength to go to London and see if you can't find him?"

Elsie was transfigured. "I could go at once," she said. "Oh, I am stronger than you think. It is only because I have been content to wait that I have grown weak. I will go and find him, and bring him home again. I know many of the places that he used to live, for he pointed them out when we were in London. He will be glad to come home."

Mrs Chegwidden was not quite prepared for this acceptance of her suggestion as one that was to be carried into effect immediately. "I believe you are stronger now that you were half an hour ago, and you'll be stronger yet if you set your mind upon it. But the doctor must say whether you are strong enough to go, and he'll be the more likely to let you do it if you take a good long sleep to-night, and keep quiet."

"I shall be strong enough," said Elsie. "Give me the child."

She had been fond of the child, as a mother must needs be fond, but it had never yet seemed to afford her the consolation it should have

afforded. Now she held it to her breast, and bent over it with a new light of love upon her face. Mrs Chegwidden had to leave her for a space, and upon her return she found Elsie humming a little lullaby as she lay back happily upon the white pillows.

"You are better already," said the woman, her face radiant. "I've done 'ee more good than doctor would have done 'ee in a month. Now drink this, and try to sleep for a while. When he comes again in the evening we will ask him how long it will be before you may go."

Elsie did not sleep. She lay in quiet content with all her old delight in living suddenly re-born in her. The day was one of sunlight and clear sky. Outside the thrushes were singing, and sparrows were busy under the eaves. She could see through the window the tops of one or two trees bursting with the new life of the spring. He would be back, she did not doubt, before the summer had come, and the golden leaf-buds turned to green.

If Elsie was suddenly made happy, so also was Mrs Chegwidden. She recovered her old joy in the discharge of the duties that fall to careful housewives, and there were many things that might have waited which got themselves done that day. Her love for Elsie had triumphed. Holden was her husband, and she desired his presence. Mrs Chegwidden

went further, therefore, and thought of their home-coming, and of the welcome she would prepare for them. It would be an event infinitely more solemn and charged with meaning than the return from their honeymoon. In remembrance it would count for more than their marriage itself.

She met the doctor with a mien so exultant that the good man could not conceal his amazement. "Well, doctor, you'll find your patient finely improved since the morning."

"Has he come back?"

"No, but she was looking so whisht when I went up to her after you left that I could see what you said was true; and then I had a thought of my own and spoke it."

"What was it?" asked the doctor.

"Why, 'twas plain before you told me that the only medicine for her would be to have her husband with her again. Think of the months he has been away: is it likely he will come back? But she's sure in her own mind, and she has made me sure, that he haven' lost his love for her. So what's to hinder her from going to search for him as soon as she've got strength?"

"But do you really know how ill she is?" asked the doctor. "'Twould be a good thing if she could do it, perhaps, but even if she begins to get better immediately it will be a

long time before she is well enough to undertake the journey to London. It would kill her now."

For once in a way Mrs Chegwidden forgot her natural courtesy. "Maybe you are right, if doctor's trade were all she had to make her well. But come upstairs and see the change in her with just a few hours of the hope of doing what I told 'ee of."

The doctor, being a sensible man, was only too glad to have a case in which he could not effect an improvement taken out of his hands. But he was not prepared for the marvellous change which had come to pass in Elsie since he saw her in the morning.

She had heard voices in the room below, and recognised his as one of the twain. When he entered he found her sitting up in bed, animated, with a little colour in her cheeks, and eager to question him. "When will you let me go, doctor?" she asked, with something of the air of a pretty child that desires a privilege especially delightful.

The doctor looked at her with an expression that grew every moment more and more unlike that which his face had worn in the morning. "Why, this is the old Elsie that I've known these twenty years," he said. "If I know anything of her, she will take the matter out of my hands, and go when she chooses to go."

"You mean that I may?" asked Elsie.

"I mean that I've been telling you for a month past it did not rest with me to make you better. I could only try to persuade you to make up your mind that you would be better. I failed, but someone has succeeded, and now I have only to help you to get stronger. That will be an easy matter."

"But when shall I be able to go?" pleaded Elsie.

"In a month?" asked the doctor.

"Oh, but that is too long! See how I have improved since the morning."

"Well, we will wait and see. You shall go as soon as you are able. Do you mean to suggest that I could prevent you?"

Elsie laughed, and to the two listeners the sound was the loveliest of music. "I have always had a great respect for you, at any rate. May I get up for a little while?"

The doctor hesitated. "Mrs Chegwidden works absolute miracles," he said. "I would have given my head to hear you ask that yesterday. Get up, of course, for half an hour, and then you will know how foolish you have been all these weeks in refusing to take my advice and resolve that you would be well. I had no medicine for you like that. But Mrs Chegwidden——"

"Nobody knows what a wonderful person she is!" said Elsie.

Mrs Chegwidden beamed. When she had seen the doctor to the door, and been rejoiced by further and more explicit exclamations of wonder on his part, she returned to Elsie, who was waiting for her help. Presently, clothed in slippers and a pretty dressing-gown, she stood, supported by the elder woman, and made a few tentative steps to the window.

"I had almost forgotten that there was a world outside, while I lay here with my thoughts. Listen to that thrush! And there are the rooms downstairs: I should sleep better to-night if I had seen them again."

"You must be careful not to do too much. Do 'ee think you could manage the stairs?"

"I want to be quite strong quickly, and I must begin at once. You will give me your arms, and I shall not find it very hard. Besides, my sleep will be more restful."

So Elsie descended to the great kitchen, Mrs Chegwidden almost carrying her. She sat for a few minutes in Holden's room and looked about her, finding a curious sense of novelty in things that were absolutely familiar, Mrs Chegwidden having carefully abstained from making even the least important alteration in the arrangement of the room. Then she realised the effort that she had been making.

"Ah!" she sighed, with a little laugh. "It will be a long time yet before I am well enough to go. I am very tired, and I think I shall almost want carrying back to my bed."

That night, when Elsie was ready to sleep, Mrs Chegwidden completed her plans and confided them to Elsie. "When you are strong enough to go, you must write a little note to John Roscorla and tell him you do want to stay with him. He will be fine and glad to see you, and will be there to meet you when you come to London."

"I think I should like to know that the letter was written," answered Elsie. "Then there will be no need to write when I am well. Will you write it? Good-night!"

Mrs Chegwidden was not a practised letter-writer, having in the course of her life found little need of the accomplishment. She sat late in the great dark kitchen, and only with great effort did she produce her letter :—

"You do know that Elsie and her husband couldn' quite agree, and that he is gone to London, and never sends a word to her. 'Tis a pity, too, for there couldn' be a couple that had more love for one another. However, he didn' come back for all her prayers, and until to-day I thought sure she wouldn' live. Now she do want to come to London and see if she can

find him, and the mere thought of it has made a new one of her. I can't say how long 'twill be before she can come, but will 'ee write and ask her to stop along with you while she is there? I couldn' bear for her to go alone."

She addressed an envelope to Mr John Roscorla, 111 Urquhart Road, Clapham Common, S.W., and, having enclosed the letter, sought out a bit of sealing-wax wherewith to fasten it. Then, with a sigh of relief, she sought her room.

She was not a woman who struck the observer as being particularly religious, but she retained from childhood a simple habit of praying aloud. Her footsteps did not awaken Elsie as she paid her a last visit. But her prayers that night were more prolonged than usual, and she had no particular control of her voice. Elsie was aroused, for the two doors were ajar. She smiled as she turned again to her sleep, and all the days of their estrangement were merged in the past.

CHAPTER XIX.

IF it were not for the fact that the mind is ever the body's superior—so that what one does is what one can do—you might have deemed that Elsie's conduct during the days that immediately followed was foolish. She had resolved to make progress rapidly, and she seemed to accomplish her resolve by forcing the rebellious body to put itself into that condition of which the exercises she compelled it to perform would be the most natural manifestations.

On the very next day a big chair, comfortably cushioned, was carried out into the little garden behind the house, and Elsie came out and sat in the open air. What was more natural than that Mrs Chegwidden should have told Spargo of the wonderful change in her, and that he should come up from the flower-grounds to see her and offer his congratulations?

"Why, you're lookin' wonderful!" he exclaimed. "They told me you was very bad,

but in another week you will be as well as ever you was."

"It do look like that," cried Mrs Chegwidden. "And as soon as she is well enough to travel, she is going up to London to join her husband before he do come back."

"And a proud man he will be," said Spargo, with magnificently feigned delight. "Is the little baby doin' well? I heard tell that she was a fine, growthy little maiden, and the very image of Mr Holden."

"She's doin' wonderful!" cried Mrs Chegwidden. "I could 'most believe 'twas she that shamed her mother into getting stronger, but now she've begun she've left the child behind. Shall I bring her out, Elsie? 'Twould do her good to have the air, and she've slept a good long time already."

"Do, please," said Elsie; and when the child was in her arms the two elder people stood watching with a sort of reverence, and no small delight.

"'Twas true what they told me," said Spargo. "She's wonderfully like her father. And she've got a look of you, too. Is it about the eyes, I wonder? 'Tis hard to tell."

Elsie laughed, glancing up at him, and then swiftly down again at the child. "There's no use in asking me," she said. "I've only had time to find out that she's exactly like—herself."

They talked thus for a little while, and then Spargo, who knew a good deal of how matters were, made a suggestion. "'Tis good to look upon 'ee again, and I warrant 'tis good to you to be in the air once more. Do 'ee think that you could walk so far as the flower-grounds if we was to help 'ee? The flowers is mostly over, but the bloody-warriors* is lovely, and there's a few others."

Elsie looked questioningly at Mrs Chegwidden. "Do you think I may try?"

"'Tis no use trying to make me give you good advice," said Mrs Chegwidden. "I'm too glad to see 'ee caring to do anything at all. So I reckon you must do what you think you would like to do, and I fancy you will."

"I should like to see the flowers again," said Elsie.

"Then you shall," responded Mrs Chegwidden. "Wait a minute: let me take the baby and put her in the cot. Then I'll come down 'long with 'ee."

The figures were English enough, in all conscience, and, except for Elsie, they possessed no element of the picturesque. Yet the procession of three that went to visit the flowers needed only to have changed its outward aspect to be entirely Japanese. The season had been

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* Wall-flowers.

a good one. The glass-houses had early yielded their abundant crops. Then, at the very moment when the first supply began to be more limited, the bulbs planted in the open had come into flower, and their yield was greater than any recorded in the history of the farm.

Yet Spargo comported himself as if the wretched bulbs had been conscious creatures, abominably behaved, and loudly lamented that they had not put off their flowering until to-day, when Elsie came to view them. But he gathered her a great handful of wall-flowers, and the spectacle of her delight in their fragrance silenced his laments.

"Sweet, aren't they?" he said. "And there's nothing like new-gathered flowers."

"You don't know how sweet," said Elsie. "But I think my chair would be almost sweeter. Will you help me back to the house?"

Spargo and Mrs Chegwidden were instant in their assistance, and soon Elsie was sitting in her cushioned chair again. "It takes some courage to make oneself get strong again," she said. "But I am going to do it, and that so quickly that the doctor will never again dare to speak as one who knows. A month!"

After this there was no hesitancy on her part, nor any thought, to all appearances, of what would be the position of affairs if she should fail in this adventure for which she was pre-

paring herself. She may—or must—have had her secret fears, but they were never allowed to be seen. Wherefore she grew stronger with an astonishing rapidity, and every day reconquered some power which had seemed lost.

The house of the doctor stood alone on the outskirts of the village, upon the side nearest to the flower-farm. It was a small, stone-built place with a tiny glass conservatory at the door, and a garden where the low and bushy borders of box made great encroachments upon the narrow pathways. A low ledge of stone, surmounted by white palings, divided it from the road.

It so happened that upon a certain morning, not long after Elsie's resolve to be better, the doctor was breakfasting at an hour that was late for Scilly. Soon after midnight he had been called to a case on one of the smaller islands, and he had not long returned. His housekeeper was loudly lamenting the irregularity of his life, and suggesting very strongly that the time had come when he ought to take to himself an assistant, who should save him somewhat. Suddenly there was a sound of the gate opening, and the woman groaned.

"There's another of them," she cried.

In another moment her tone changed, as she glanced out of the window and perceived who was the newcomer. "Look, doctor!" she cried.

"Can 'ee see who's come? I thought you believed she hadn' many days to live?"

The doctor rose from his seat. Then, with an exclamation of unmitigated surprise, he went out to the front door of the house and opened it.

"What on earth is the meaning of this?" he said to the girl who confronted him. "Do you want to frighten me out of my life?"

Elsie looked laughingly into his face, and for a moment did not speak. She had, indeed, a certain look of frailness and delicacy, but these had somehow no other effect than that of increasing the air of exquisite youthfulness which had ever been her chief charm. Her face was thin and pale, yet the clear pallor of her complexion had no hint of illness in it, and the lines of her face spoke only of youth. She was radiant with pride in her achievement, and in the obvious amazement of her doctor.

"Good-morning, doctor," she said. "You have come to see me so often of late that I began to feel I monopolised your time and caused you more trouble than one has the right to cause anyone. To-day my conscience would not suffer me to continue to trade upon your kindness any longer, and I have walked down, to save you the trouble of coming up to the farm. Besides, I wanted to prove to you that you have made me almost well again. I was

sure that you did not fully understand how much of my old strength I have recovered."

"Come in," said the doctor. "Come in and rest yourself, and tell me the meaning of all this. I will own I had no idea that you were capable of so much."

"Now, then," he continued when they were within the house. "What is the meaning of this?"

"I thought," said Elsie, "that I should like to show you I am getting stronger. Besides, the sunlight tempted me, and it is good to be able to walk again."

"Stronger!" cried the doctor. "You are not the same woman."

He looked as he spoke at her face, which was almost happy in its anticipation of happiness restored, and Elsie understood him.

"Indeed," she said, "I think I am another woman. To think that I lay there all those weeks!"

"I suppose you want me to say when you may go to London?" asked the doctor.

"That was why I came down," owned Elsie, with a swift glance at him.

"Do you remember what I said to you on the day when you first took it into your head that you would get well and go upon this journey? I told you that I suspected I should have little to say in the matter of fixing the day for your departure. I am sure of it now, and I

do not object in the least. You have been playing the game without any regard for the rules, and you have played it most successfully. You must just go when you feel that you are able. If I were you I would be a little more than certain upon that point. I know you will be careful."

"I may go whenever I like?"

"Yes, if you will promise to be careful."

"Ah, doctor," said Elsie gravely, "you don't know how careful I shall be." A few moments later she rose to return home, and the doctor, accompanying her to the gate, stood watching her for a little while. "'Tis the old Elsie come back to us," he said. "But if she does not find that husband of hers she will die."

Elsie reached home, and found Mrs Chegwidden awaiting her, full of curiosity as to the results of her expedition. "Well," she said, "what do the doctor say?"

"I am to go whenever I choose to do so," said Elsie.

"I suppose that do mean to-morrow?"

"To-morrow will be Saturday," said Elsie, "and I could not go seeking him on Sunday. I think it will be on Monday. I have been a month, after all."

"Have 'ee thought about the baby?" asked Mrs Chegwidden. "How will 'ee manage

about she? Will 'ee leave her for me to take care of? You will not be long away."

"How could I think of doing that?" said Elsie, almost indignantly. "I thought we had arranged everything, but I suppose I took it all for granted. Why, the child is what he will want to see at once when I have found him. And did you think I was going without you?"

"My dear child," began Mrs Chegwidden protestingly; but Elsie would not be interrupted.

"I shall want you with me. I have much to do that will be hard, and I should be afraid to be alone among strangers, even though they were never so kind. You will come with me, I am sure. Think how it would be if after all I did not find him."

Mrs Chegwidden could not quite conceal her delight at this arrangement. "But who ever heard tell of such a thing at my time of life? I was once over to Penzance. We went over 'pon a fishing-smack when my poor John was took with his last sickness, and doctor wanted him to have extra advice. But to think of going to London now! Besides, you are fit to go before the Queen, but I haven' got the clothes for it. I should disgrace 'ee all the time you was with me, and the people would be wondering what fashion thing you had brought to town with 'ee."

"Nonsense!" cried Elsie. "They will all

fall in love with you. Besides, there is plenty of time before us, and if anything wants doing the work will be an occupation. For I shall just be wishing for the steamer from now until the moment when it starts."

"Well," said Mrs Chegwidden, "come to think upon it, I believe that is what Roscorla meant for us to do. I knawed en when he wadn' but a boy, and knawed his people too. Let me see: where is the letter . . . . Do 'ee think that's how he meant it?"

"Of course he did," said Elsie, not needing to see the letter again. "You know it, and you cannot have thought I should not want you to come with me. I could not go without you."

"But you do look so pretty when you're dressed," began Mrs Chegwidden, apologetically. "I haven' got the clothes; and besides —at my time of life!"

"We'll soon see about the clothes," said Elsie promptly. "Come upstairs. But I must have my comfortable chair, for I begin to be tired."

The remainder of the day was spent in the examination of Mrs Chegwidden's wardrobe, and in the carrying out of such alterations as suggested themselves to Elsie, who had visited London, and learned the ways of its inhabitants.

Towards evening the doctor called in to see how matters were going.

"Not gone yet?" he said. "I thought you would have been half-way to London by this time."

"No," said Elsie, "I will rest to-morrow and Sunday, and we shall start on Monday."

"And you needn' be afraid that she won't have good care taken of her," added Mrs Chegwidden. "She've asked me to go with her. Did 'ee ever hear tell of such a thing at my time of life?"

CHAPTER XX.

THE home of the Roscorlas at 111, Urquhart Road, Clapham Common, was not one of the newest streets in that delectable locality. Its houses all had basements, and the rooms upon the ground floor, divided by folding-doors, were often let to young gentlemen lodgers. It was wide, and had at times a deceptive air of quiet.

Hither did the little party drive in a slow four-wheeler with Mr Roscorla, who had met them at Paddington. Elsie, as you may well imagine, was desperately tired, and hardly in a condition to see things in their pleasantest aspect. Mr Roscorla felt it incumbent upon him to make conversation, and Elsie, who had not met him since his last visit to Scilly, some three years earlier, was surprised to find how he had changed. She would not permit herself to recognise that what it really amounted to was that he was not quite a gentleman. She

could not but remember her uncle Cunnack, and a hundred others of the quiet-living folk of Scilly, and compared with these the good man suffered inevitably.

Yet he was very anxious to show her all the kindness he could; and in a different way he was no less attentive to Mrs Chegwidden. He told them the names of all the streets they passed through that were in any way notable, and pointed out the principal buildings on the way. But Elsie's spirits were considerably dashed—why, she could scarce have told—and somehow her hopes began to seem infinitely less reasonable than they had appeared while she was still in St Mary's.

It was dark when they reached Urquhart Road, and Elsie mounted the steps of the house with a little dread. She began to realise that she had come among strangers. She was shown at once into the front room, which overlooked the street, and there welcomed by Mrs Roscorla, a little grey-haired woman who seemed older than her husband. There were also two daughters, both of whom suggested the thought that Nature had meant them to be pretty, just failing to carry its intentions into effect for lack of care in the finishing details. All stared at Elsie with ill-concealed curiosity.

There was no time for conversation at first. Elsie sank into a chair, and vaguely realised

that she was upsetting the whole household, for her boxes, albeit neither bulky nor numerous, created a block in the narrow passage, which the hat-stand, inlaid with small mirrors, was of itself almost sufficient to fill. She also gathered that Mr Roscorla was having something of a dispute with the cabman.

However, it was over at last. The luggage had been put out of the way, and their host entered. "Impudent fellows, these cabmen," he said. "But I took his number and threatened to report him, and that sufficed." He spoke perhaps with a view of impressing his visitors, but he failed with Elsie, who, during her week or two in London, had always greatly admired the manner in which Holden judged the distances they traversed, and made his cabman accept his computation without a word. She did not understand that his success in dealing with these men was due to the fact that he always overpaid them.

"Now," he said, as if the idea had struck him for the first time, "I suppose you are tired and would like to have supper quickly."

"If I may go to my room," said Elsie, "I should be better pleased. I am afraid I am altogether too tired for anything else."

"Of course you are," said Mrs Roscorla. "Come with me and I will show you the way." Elsie glanced forlornly at Mrs Chegwidden,

who regarded her in return with an expression exactly similar. They felt themselves strangers in a strange land.

The room was a comfortable one, for now at night it was not possible to see the small neglected back gardens, with ugly houses built of sooty yellow brick beyond, on which the window looked. Yet Elsie found it impossible to sleep. She was still awake when her door opened noiselessly and Mrs Chegwidden stole in, her candle carefully shaded.

"Are 'ee sleepin', Elsie?" she whispered.

"No," said Elsie. "I do not feel sleepy: only tired."

"Poor dear!" murmured Mrs Chegwidden. "'Twas a long journey for 'ee. However, you're here now."

"Yes!" sighed Elsie.

"'Tis a fine big house, edn' it? And I'm sure they're kind as kind can be."

One of the daughters of the house had a strangely shrill and unpleasant laugh. The household was now mounting the stairs to sleep, and the sharp-edged sound was heard. Elsie did not answer her companion for a space.

"Yes," she said at last. "I am sure they will be kind. Only . . . . I wonder what they think of it all? They looked at me so curiously; I suppose they cannot understand."

"Well," said Mrs Chegwidden, "so long as

they do give 'ee house-room you needn' trouble about what they think. You'll have your husband back again soon, and then there'll be nothing else that will matter. Have 'ee thought how you're goin' to begin searchin' for him?"

"There is one place where I know I shall find him if I wait long enough," said Elsie. "I am sure he has often been there of a morning since he came away from Scilly. But it may be a long time—who can tell? He may have grown tired of going there."

"Don't 'ee think that, my dear," said Mrs Chegwidden. "You may depend on it you will find him waiting for you first going off. Now you must sleep. Good-night."

"Good-night," said Elsie; but she could in nowise obey Mrs Chegwidden's injunction as to sleeping. All through the night a dog kept barking at intervals somewhere close at hand, and there were manifestly those in the neighbourhood who kept poultry. Also the railway was not far away, and, being accustomed to the lovely quiet of the islands, she was continually listening for the noise of trains even when there was none to be heard for the moment. She lay wide awake until the dawn came, and all her hopes seemed foolishness. Innumerable possibilities of evil presented themselves to her, and all seemed probabilities, for she was in that state, known to the sufferer from insomnia,

when it appears that the perceptive faculties have gained a power of seeing clearly which is to the sense of the day as the hard clear light of the electric arc is to moonbeams.

Towards dawn she fell into uneasy slumbers, but she was early awake again. Mrs Chegwidden had taken charge of the baby for the night, and Elsie rose and dressed and went across to her room. A little later she went downstairs. She found that she had descended before she was expected. Mr Roscorla had breakfasted, indeed—his city duties taking him early from his home. But the place was a little disorderly, and she was shown into the drawing-room to spend the interval between the first and the second breakfasts.

It was a good enough room, but she found it infinitely depressing. Upon an inlaid table were laid a number of books: for the most part volumes in a cheap series of the poets, each of them fitted with an introduction by some young man, who wrote as though he had himself discovered — or, indeed, created — the author whom he edited. There was an assortment—a commercial traveller's assortment—of chairs in tortured wicker-work, bedecked with superfluous silk ribbons. A banjo stood in a corner. Cheap engravings, after a couple of sentimental R.A.'s, decorated the walls, and the fireplace was draped with "art" muslin; an over-

mantel, with numberless bits of looking-glass in it, was laden with bits of Venetian glass, and modern Japanese pottery from the tea-shops. It was not London, of course, but Elsie was hardly in a state where nice discrimination is possible; it all made her long for the great dark kitchen over in Scilly, where everything was solid, and old, and where, while nothing had cost much, there was nothing that you would dream of describing as cheap.

It is possible that her observation was at fault, but at breakfast her egg was one which had plainly been laid for more than a week, and the daughter with the unpleasant laugh was especially vivacious. Moreover, there were limits to the conversation possible. The Roscorlas had all read Mrs Chegwidden's letter to the master of the house, and made guesses more or less inaccurate as to the causes of Elsie's loneliness. But this curiosity kept them dumb upon the subject, while it made them conscious of the foolishness of conversing in the ordinary manner as to more ordinary affairs.

In the course of the morning, however, Mrs Roscorla took an opportunity to talk privately with Elsie, and in doing so displayed a kindliness that could scarce have been surpassed.

"You must know, my dear," she said

smoothing her dress a little nervously, "that we want to help you to the utmost of our power. Anything that we can do for your assistance will be done gladly. Of course we know something of why you have come to London, though I will own that what I have heard of the matter has become more of a puzzle to me now that I have seen you. Will you tell me if there are any plans that you have formed?"

Elsie looked at her rather forlornly. "I don't think I can explain things to you. It is simply that I was married about a year ago, and lived most happily. Then my husband came away to London, thinking for some reason or other that it would be better for us both if we lived apart. He half promised to come back some day, but he has not done it, and I am sure that he would have done so almost immediately, had he not been prevented by a shame that will grow worse and worse with every day he spends away from me. I know that he will be longing to come back, and so I have come to ask him to come home again."

Mrs Roscorla appeared to be puzzled. "But you told Mr Roscorla that you did not know his address," she said, "and all his efforts have not sufficed to discover it. He has taken a great deal of trouble. How do you think of setting about the task, if you don't know where he is?"

"I came because I simply had to find him if

I was to live," said Elsie. "I think that sooner or later I should surely come across him, even though I had no idea as to his whereabouts. But I think I know where we shall meet."

"Have you had some news, then?" asked Mrs Roscorla.

"None since he left the island, and wrote to tell me of what he meant to do. But have you heard how he first of all made up his mind to come to Scilly? He was very tired of London, and tired of working at tasks which were hateful to him, and getting nothing in return that was worth the having."

"But——" began Mrs Roscorla, not understanding.

"Oh!" cried Elsie, unconsciously repeating an oft-repeated utterance of her husband's, "he made plenty of money, of course; but it brought him no satisfaction. In order to be contented with life at all he had to spend a great deal of money, most of it on things that he did not enjoy half so much as he would have enjoyed the things that cost no money at all in such a place as St Mary's. He was always making up his mind to go away to some place where life would go more simply, and do no labour for money, but merely work when he chose at the work he loved doing; and he continually did not go, because no place attracted him especially. Then he went into

Covent Garden one morning very early, and while he was looking at the earliest flowers from the islands he met poor uncle."

"Why, I remember about him now," cried Mrs Roscorla. "When Mr Cunnack stopped with us, when he was in London for the last time, he told us one day of a young man he had met and talked with in the Market. He seemed to be very much taken with him, too."

"They were the best of friends," said Elsie. "A day or two after he came over to Scilly, and came to live with us, because he knew uncle, and wanted to be among the flowers. Then . . . . You can understand that we went to the Market more than once when we were in London for our honeymoon; and why it is I think that I shall find Guy there now."

"It is a small thing to put your trust in," said Mrs Roscorla doubtfully. "After what has happened that might very well be the place of all others that he would avoid. Or perhaps——"

"No," cried Elsie, guessing at the thought which Mrs Roscorla hesitated to put into words. "He has not forgotten. He is living miserably here in London, and longing to come back to Scilly. He was fond of the Market long ago—years before he knew that I existed. Now he will go there more often than ever; some day I shall find him."

She had such an air of clinging desperately to a hope of whose elusiveness she was continually aware, that Mrs Roscorla was conscious of a great outbreak of pitying kindness within her. "My dear," she said, "I hope you will find him, and somehow I believe you will. I am sure that you deserve to. I wonder if he will ever know, when you have come together again, what a fortunate man he is in having such a wife."

Most of that day Elsie stayed within the house, and took the rest that she needed. Until the evening there was no ceasing of the stream of milk-carts, butchers'-carts, and costers' barrows that passed down the long, ugly streets, and the cries of the hawkers preyed upon her like a hateful physical pain. Here, she thought, was a piece of the London life she had imagined so big and so absorbing. Yet with all her efforts she could not but be conscious of every separate raucous cry in the roadway. She longed for the morrow, when the quest of her husband might be actually begun.

Mr Roscorla found her plan a much more practical one than his wife had done. "I can't help thinking that all will go right," he said. "To-morrow is Thursday, and he will know that that is one of the Market's good days. You should be there by about six, so that we must have your cab ordered. Well, I would

be very pleased to come with you in the morning, to bear you company there, and if you do not find him, put you into a train before I go in to the office."

"It is very kind of you to think of that," said Elsie nervously. "But——"

"Can't you see, John," cried Mrs Roscorla, "that she must go alone? You would only be in the way."

"I suppose I should," said Roscorla. "Well, I meant it kindly."

"I am sure you did," said Elsie. "But I must go alone, as Mrs Roscorla says."

Mrs Chegwidden looked at her questioningly across the table.

"No," continued Elsie. "Not even Aunt must come. I must go alone."

And so she rose the next morning and travelled in a noisy and badly-horsed hansom through the grey ugly streets that lie on the south side of the river. She reached the Market very little after six o'clock, and waited there forlornly until the business of the place was almost concluded. Then she gave up hope for the day, and returned home.

Mrs Chegwidden met her at the door. "You haven' found him?" she cried.

"No," said Elsie sadly. "He was not there to-day."

But Mrs Roscorla made a brave effort to

restore her cheerfulness. "Well, you can hardly expect to succeed at the first try. Everyone knows that Saturday is the best day in the Market. You must make up your mind that you will meet him then."

Elsie sighed. "Ah! but it is a long time to wait!" she said, as she bent over her child to hide her face.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOLDEN came out of the Park and walked to his rooms, hardly conscious of whither he was going.

The touch of the child's hands, the sound of its voice, had altogether changed the aspect of the world. He saw the past with new eyes, and tasted the full punishment of his folly.

He had boasted when he first fled out of London that he was about to escape from the intolerable need of struggling after unnecessaries, and to be concerned with nothing that was not an essential of life. He saw now that he had held in his hands the one thing necessary to happiness, and that he had flung it away from him for the sake of a mere mood. Now that he had cut himself off from the very hope of expiation, he knew it had been ordained from the beginning that his life would fail or succeed according as he had or had not Elsie's love to sweeten it.

An opinion strangely allied to the newest fantasies of modernity influenced him greatly. He knew that he had been merely foolish and brutal: that if he had been bestial also, and had condescended to go back and express a certain regret, common opinion would have called on Elsie to thank God and be humbly grateful. The natural course of procedure would have been that he should return to Scilly and endeavour to secure his wife's forgiveness. The feeling that has been named prevented him. He would have given more than his life for the necessary courage, but he lacked the daring even to think of returning. It seemed to him that, having done what he had done, he would only insult her if he appeared to imagine that by any stretch of love or mercy she could bring herself to receive him back. Even the bare expression of his remorse would have been hardly more decent.

He flung himself into his work. The "Idylls" continued, and the novel neared its end. Every day he worked until his fingers refused to hold the pen; and though he had little sleep at nights, he somehow gathered strength to go on working the next day. It was strange he should do this, for he had got past forgetting, work being a drug which had ceased to act upon his system.

He had no doubt that he was the father of

a child: he had always had a strong affection for children, but now the paternal instinct caught hold on him, and he hungered for what he might not go to in Scilly. He had known too, or he would hardly have made her his wife, that Elsie was the other, and necessary, half of his life. But he had hardly realised what the absence of that necessary half must mean.

Gradually, as he thought more and more of Elsie's loneliness, a desperate resolve grew up in him. Day and night he was haunted by a vision of his wife, pale, girlish, and with eyes infinitely sad. They showed no sign of anger, but he saw his own damnation written in them. Yet he was slowly arriving at a decision to return. He could not ask forgiveness; he could not hope, nor attempt, to make the smallest reparation. But it seemed to him there would be infinite consolation if he might tell her something of his sorrow.

For a long time he vacillated betwixt one mood and the other, resolving now that he would surely go to her; now, that to intrude upon a life he had so injured would be only to increase the evil he had done. Here was fresh torture for him. In the end he resolved that his clear duty was to accept the only opportunity of self-abasement, and go back at least.

The resolve once formed, he gave himself no opportunity for further vacillation. He rose

one morning with his mind made up. The rest of the day was spent in seeing people with whom he had business that must be settled before he could leave London, and in other preparations for the return to Scilly. He had done all that was needed before nightfall : after that he could only wait for the morning, when he was to start.

Sleep would have been a blessing, for at this juncture there was no use in any further expenditure of thought upon the subject of his return. He had simply to go back. But the benefit of forgetfulness was denied him, and before the dawn had come he abandoned all attempts to find it, and, rising, dressed and went out into the quiet streets.

He walked without any particular consciousness of the direction in which he was going, but presently he found himself upon the Embankment. He leaned upon the parapet and gazed over the dull waters at the lamps on the further side of the river. A shower fell once, but he stood in the shelter of a tree, and it was to him only a beautiful sound.

Gradually the river emerged from the obscurity which had brooded over it, and the lamps were extinguished. The sparrows had long been busy ; now, as he walked by the Embankment gardens, some songster of greater gifts broke suddenly into liquid music. The

dawn had come triumphantly, and a new day was beginning.

For a little while longer he continued his desultory promenade. Then he took note of all the carts making for the Market to fetch the flowers that later in the day should delight the hearts of prisoners in the suburbs. The place had already so many associations for him that to think of it on this morning which was to be his last in London (unless Elsie should be willing to return with him) was to have formed a resolve to pay it a farewell visit.

He went up one of the streets leading to the Strand, and onward to the Market, where he had been so often a visitor. The business of the place was just beginning, and he moved about among the beautiful stalls without let or hindrance.

The time of the daffodils was over : you had the gifts of Spring, and not merely the lovely tokens she sends before to assure the world of her immediate advent. The place was a blaze of splendid colour, and the fragrance of it a delight. The falling rain had soothed him as it whispered among the leaves. The flowers had the same influence, and for a while he forgot to be troubled as he looked on masses of azaleas in every shade, from that of the daffodil's paler part to the very colour of flame. There were lilies, white and golden, and roses enough to

have made all the city fragrant for a day. He walked among them with a new contentment.

Suddenly, however, his heart stood still, and for a moment he could have wished himself in any place but that in which he stood. Clad in a soft grey gown and jacket, with a big hat whose adornments spoke of the spring, Elsie had entered the Market. He looked at her eagerly, for a resurrection from the dead could scarce have shown him a spectacle more surprising.

She did not see him at first. She stood looking about her with a strange mixture of eagerness and shyness. He observed that she was pale and her face thinner than it was wont to be. But he rejoiced, also, to behold that otherwise she seemed to have kept her health. It struck him that something like a miracle must have befallen to bring her here on this morning of all the mornings that ever were.

For a space he watched her. Then he came out of his concealment and moved towards her, wondering what words would be given him.

She saw him instantly. There was a little cry of joy, and in a moment she was in his arms, and he was kissing her, and murmuring inarticulate regrets. The market people observed the scene, and were naturally interested, but Holden was not aware of their

attention. He would fain have held her in his arms eternally, for he knew not how to defend himself, or, rather, to beseech her forgiveness.

"You will come back?" said Elsie at last.

"I should have come back to-day," he said. "I wanted your forgiveness, at least. Will you take me back?"

Elsie looked up at him with glad tears in her eyes. "I came up to seek you, dear," she said simply.

"There is nothing I can say," he murmured. "To say that I implore forgiveness, and almost wish you would refuse it, is to have made matters no better. There is nothing I can do."

"You have promised to come back," said Elsie simply. "And, Guy . . . there is another now. Our child is waiting for you."

"I did not know when I came away," he said clumsily. "I was coming back to-day. Everything is ready, but I could not sleep for thinking, and I have been wandering all the night. I could not leave London without seeing the Market once again. I always thought of you and its flowers together."

"I knew you would," said Elsie, "and I envied them their coming to London where you might see them. That is why I found you here to-day. I knew you would come here often."

He looked at her with a sort of wonder. "I wish there were something I could say," he said again.

"There's no need," answered Elsie. "You will always be with me after this, and what we cannot forget I shall come to understand. But we must go home now. The little daughter will be awake and waiting for you. I would not name her until I had you to help me in the choice."

They had by this time wandered a long way from the Market; oblivious of all save the fact that they were together again. Now Holden hailed a cab and they drove southwards.

Holden held one of Elsie's hands, and for the most part looked straight ahead of him, with eyes that saw nothing. The thought of the child that was waiting filled him with a sort of awe, and it was only at intervals he turned and gazed at her, as if he could hardly believe that she was really by his side. Elsie was well content. She leaned back in the corner and studied his face, and she knew that he had undergone during the past months more than all the suffering she had pictured him as enduring.

They were arrived at Urquhart Road at last, and Holden stepped out on the pavement and gave Elsie a hand with a certain clumsiness and an air of almost stupid solemnity. Mrs Cheg-

widden appeared behind the lace curtains, and then rushed out of sight so quickly that only Elsie perceived her. Holden paid the cabman, and they mounted the steps together.

The door was opened before they had reached the topmost step, and Mrs Chegwidden stood awaiting them. There was a moment's awkwardness, during which none quite knew which of the many thoughts that occupied their three brains was the one which might most wisely be expressed at this juncture. The child came to the rescue by raising its voice in lamentation in the front room. "There," said Mrs Chegwidden, "she do know that her father is come home, the dear of her!"

Elsie moved forward silently, and Holden followed her into the room. Mrs Chegwidden stood for a moment listening to the first few soothing words that Elsie spoke over the cradle. Then she quietly closed the door and turned away. There were tears in her eyes, but she was smiling.

THE END.

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